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CARRY'S CONFESSION.

VOL. II.

CARRY'S CONFESSION.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"HIGH CHURCH," "NO CHURCH,"
"OWEN: A WAIF," "MATTIE: A STRAY,"
&c., &c.

"How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true."
TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BOOK II.

CONTINUED.

A STRANGE COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER VI.

NEAL SEEKS ADVISERS.

NEAL GALBRAITH saw no more of the carriage-breaker's daughter for several days—days of suspense to him, fraught with evil omen. Open war had been declared between Mr. Webber and him, and each must do his best to circumvent the other—the prize being Carry Webber! Neal was full of plots, resolved to act, excited, and not himself. Business life was stale and unprofitable now, and he was merged in the meshes of a love-story, from which he made no effort to free himself.

Neal really loved Carry—he *was* different to most youths of his age—youths more rash than he would have acted less rashly when the irrevocable step was to be considered; but he had made up his mind, and was waiting, lynx-eyed, for an opportunity.

Meanwhile, what had become of Carry? This thought perplexed him, rendered him irritable, made life at the desk a something worse than life at the galleys. Mr. Pike also irritated him with inquiries —begged to know what was on Neal's mind; whether Neal had fallen into debt, formed bad acquaintances, or been tempted into evil; and still looked doubtfully when Neal denied all three, and yet held back explanation. Mr. Pike could not imagine that Neal would have remained so distraught under other circumstances; therefore he watched Neal carefully, and left tracts relating to all kinds of moral weaknesses upon Neal's desk, worrying his fellow-clerk unnecessarily.

Neal was indignant at last, and begged to be free from a pertinacity that was galling and insulting; and Mr. Pike appeared subdued beneath Neal's protest. Thankful for freedom from one tormentor, Neal went home to Fife Street, to find, to his amazement, that tormentor sitting composedly in the front parlour in conversation with Mrs. Higgs.

"Mr. Pike—I'll never forgive this!" exclaimed Neal.

"My dear Neal, I think you will," said Mr.

Pike; "I don't like to see a young man going wrong, without trying to save him. And a young man like you, too, with so great a charge on your hands!"

"I have done my duty by my charge—will you do yours, and go?"

"No, I shan't go till I like, Neal," asserted Mr. Pike, becoming red in the face, and planting himself more firmly on the chair; "I am here as a visitor to Mrs. Higgs, and you have no right to order my departure!"

Mr. Pike was indignant, and even obstinate; but only his heightened colour suggested the doubt of his equanimity being disturbed. His voice was not raised beyond its customary placidity of utterance.

"Here as a visitor to Mrs. Higgs," he repeated, as though that was his basis of argument.

"Here as a spy upon me! Good God! sir, what am I to you that you should dog me about like this?"

"Don't get excited, Neal—I would not blaspheme, if I were you—what good can *that* do? I am not dodging you, for I was here first!"

"Mrs. Higgs, tell him nothing about me," adjured

Neal; "as you are my friend, I ask you not to attempt to satisfy a curiosity that is impertinent!"

"No, not impertinent, Neal," added Mr. Pike.

Neal went upstairs, and shortly afterwards Mr. Pike departed. When the door had closed, Neal went down to pour another vial of wrath upon his landlady's head.

"What have you told him?"

"I haven't told him nothing, because I'd nothing to tell that would suit him. He came here saying how 'fraid he was you'd got into bad hands, and frightened me enough, surely. But *you* in bad hands!—oh! I gave it him for that!"

"He did not see my father?"

"He would have seen him if I had let him."

"This man's curiosity is becoming unbearable. What business is it of his?"

"I never could understand people fidgeting about other people's 'fairs. But oh! Master Neal, there is something the matter, after all!"

"Well! I have not denied it."

"It's Carry, I know!—what's she done?"

"Nothing!"

"I know it's Carry! They wouldn't let me in the house yesterday—my own sister's house!—and

Webber called me a panderness, which is an animal I never heard of, though it's a 'sulting name enough, I dare say."

"Where is Carry?"

"My dear boy, how should I know? Won't they let you see her?—ain't they 'posed towards the match yet?"

"They are all against me!" said Neal.

"Praps it's for the best."

"I don't want any comfort, Mrs. Higgs. You *are* my friend, you say?"

"Always—at all times a friend to you and yourn, sir!"

"I know that—I feel that, or I should not talk like this. See to my father, then, to-night—carry your work up there, tell him that I am called out suddenly—that I am very busy just now—and take away his plans when he becomes dreamy in his talk."

"But——"

"I must go out—I can't stop here."

Neal went out on watch. He spent the night in Shepherd Street, and met with nothing to reward his vigils; he came back tired and morose. All the world seemed against him—even Carry

made no sign. He would go to Globe Court the next day, and see Carry's brother. After all he did not regret the introduction, for here were friends of Carry, who would work for him.

He went early to business, and reached Globe Court at eight o'clock. The court was alive with dirty and bare-footed children, turned out of doors and out of the way whilst the rooms were put to rights, or work went on. The winter was not over yet, and frost came still with the early morning; but Globe Court denizens did not study frost, and winter or summer was the same there. One toddling infant, with a black eye, and a ragged night-gown, insisted upon following Neal from No. 1 to No. 17, shrieking for "a hapenny," and two or three aborigines flung stones at him.

Our hero knocked at No. 17, and waited patiently for admittance. After awhile some one from within tapped hastily upon the window glass.

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Galbraith. Can I see you for a moment?"

"All right, sir—wait a little while, please."

Our hero waited patiently, and after some ten minutes the door was opened, and the giantess appeared in the doorway.

"Come in, sir. We're late up to-day, and Joe's got a headache—he was out late at a hevening party, after play-house hours—you won't mind seeing him in bed, praps?"

"No—where is he?"

"In the parlour, sir."

Neal went into the parlour, and found an extempore bed upon the floor, and a red-eyed, white-faced man blinking at him from a variety of articles serving as bed-clothes for the nonce.

"Ah! old fellow," was the familiar salutation from the recumbent one, "what's up now, to bring you here so precious early in the morning?"

"I want you to help me. I'm in trouble."

"The devil you are!—then you want that fifteen *pence* back. You might have known that I would have paid you when I could, and that when I couldn't, I wouldn't say anything about it—because it's hurtful to your feelings and to mine. What's-er time?"

Neal looked from him to the wan-featured giantess, a ghastly being enough in the daylight, with her hair awry, and her dress askew.

"Not quite straight yet, Joe isn't," she said,

apologetically. "Joe's allers over-friendly when the drinks in him. And he was coming home at twelve, to the minute, he said!"

"Jones had a—card—party—till—four," said Joe, slowly and decisively; "and I promised Jones, whenever he had a card-party, to make one —and it's no good, now—it's—all—over, kicking up a blessed row about it! What's-er-time?"

"Half-past eight, nearly," said Neal; "I must go now. Will you be at home this evening?"

"Engaged at Vic. for a week, obliging friend of mine whose—whose not *let out* till Saturday. I don't get any pay for it, but I oblige a friend, and no one can ever say I didn't oblige a friend—ever. What's-er-time, you say?"

Neal told him again, looking disconsolately at the dirty floor. He might have guessed the futility of coming here for help, he thought.

"I suppose something has gone wrong with you and Carry?" said the giantess, sitting down unceremoniously on Joe, who struggled away from her, and then went off into a half-doze; "if you'll tell me, I'll let Joe know, when he's able to understand better, and he and I may be of help."

"They have hidden Carry away from me—they

are determined that she shall marry some one else —I must see her, or hear from her! Joe might watch the place in the day-time, whilst I am away. We must meet duplicity with craft!"

"Joe's a deep 'un, when he likes," said Mrs. Webber, thoughtfully; "he often sees her when we're pushed hard, and she's very good, and gives us wittles, and clothes, and money, on the sly. Joe'll manage that at once; I can't be of any help myself, for I allers gets a crowd round me—and, besides, Joe won't let me make myself too cheap, having a London c'nexion like."

"Ah! I see."

"It's like a play, all this; and I do feel for you two young 'uns kept away from each other—Joe and I married on the sly, too, and no one knowed a bit about it till it was all over. It cost Joe two pound odd, to get a license."

"A license—how is it managed?" asked Neal.

"You'll have a difficulty, because she's a miner, you see."

"Ah! I suppose so."

"Joe might go with you, as a relation of the miner—I'll make Joe a strong cup of tea, and then talk it over with him—shall I?"

"If you please."

Joe swung round again in his bed, rubbed his eyes, scratched his head, and then suddenly sat up and stared at the speakers.

"What's-er-time?"

"Time for breakfast, Joe. I'm talking of making you a cup of tea, my dear."

The giantess let her hand fall affectionately on the shoulder of the drunkard—in penury, sorrow, and drink, always true to him, and seeing virtues in him to which the outer world was blind. A woman of hard material, whose fine feelings, if she had not outgrown them, were not easily affected, and who put up with all privations for Joe's sake, repining not at her lot, though her father had a caravan of his own!

"A cup of tea, with a dash of brandy in it. Nothing berrer."

"Lay yourself down till I make it, then. How's your head now, Joe?"

"Oh! awful, Selina—someone pickaxing it behind. Jones always has cheap gin, and bad stuff always knocks me over. What's-er-time, please?"

Joe was again informed of the time, and again proceeded to compose himself, altering his

mind at the last minute, and sitting up again.

"I've heard every word you two have been palavering about," he said, knowingly; "so it's no good thinking I'm too stupid to make it out. I'll see into the matter first thing, sir; and Carry's not to be done by the governor, wise as he thinks himself."

"He's a brute!" said the giantess.

"Not he," said Joe, quickly; "he's a man that can't put up with much—a bad-tempered sort of fellow, and don't look over things easily; but he isn't a brute. I don't say anything against him—I'd go back and manage his business for him to-morrow, if he liked, and never rake up a word about old grievances, about being taken to the door, and him saying, 'There's your home for good, Joe!'—meaning the streets. It wasn't kind, perhaps, but I *was* a young devil—ha! ha! —and I deserved it!"

He wiped his eyes suddenly with his dirty shirt sleeves, and then began to laugh again spasmodically.

"I don't know that I'm any the worse—I do get my own way, and my Investment don't grumble much, though she could smash me if she choosed—one of

her accomplishments, Mr. Galbraith, is to smash flint stones with her thumb, and it draws people too, though it's all knack, bless you, not strength! And I should—very—much—like to know what the time is?"

Looking at his watch, Neal was reminded of the flight of time himself, and hastened to withdraw.

"I will call this evening to hear if there be any news," said Neal; "don't let him go half-drunk to work, Mrs. Webber."

"I think he's sharpest when half-gone myself."

"He must not add to Carry's unhappiness in any way—remember that."

Neal went away dispirited to business—at eleven o'clock in the morning a warehouseman entered the office, and informed Neal that a gentleman wished to speak to him without. Mr. Pike left off writing to listen to this, and then watched our hero off his stool and along the office.

"Neal," he cried when our hero was at the door, "don't go—it's a writ!"

"No, it is not, sir," said Neal.

"If it's money—if you have been in any way implicated—why, you can have it," said he; "I'm

sure you'll pay me back again, and let this be a warning to you—won't you, Neal?"

Neal was touched by this man's interest in him —this man whom he had treated rudely, and whose interest in him he had resisted. There was the weakness to think ill of another in our hero's disposition, but there was the nobleness to acknowledge the error, and that is peculiar only to heroes.

Neal walked back to the desk with his right hand outstretched.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pike, for acting as I have done towards you. I think you are my friend—my real friend, although I don't know what I have done to deserve it."

"Then you'll tell me what's the matter. I think that I can offer you good advice," he said, as he held Neal's hand in his.

"I will tell you soon, sir; I can't now—I'm not doing wrong."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure of that, sir," answered Neal.

"Thank God!—I *was* afraid," he murmured; "I have seen so many young men give way at your age, and drift away from all that should have helped to stay them."

"I am stronger than ever, sir."

So he was in his resolution; for opposition and mad passion had strengthened him. He went away promising to confess all in a few days, and leaving Mr. Pike content with his promise.

CHAPTER VII.

ORANGE-BLOSSOMS.

WE astute readers always more or less behind the scenes, and cognizant of the machinery that sets our puppets in motion, may think that Neal Galbraith had not acted wisely in his choice of advisers. We, who attempt Neal Galbraith's history, are of the same opinion; but Neal was not in his most sagacious mood, and it may have been already perceived that, clever and far-seeing as he was in many respects, he was not quick at judging character.

The men and women passing round him, he took time to understand, arriving, in due course, at a true estimate of them—proceeding methodically towards the truth, as he had proceeded methodically in life, before he met Romance in Fife Street.

It was doubtful if there were one—even Carry Webber—whom he had encountered in London,

that he yet thoroughly understood—his employer, Walter Tressider, Mr. Pike, or Mrs. Higgs. There was a faint consciousness, scarcely a suspicion, that Mrs. Higgs was sorry for his engagement to her niece, and that turned him from her to her ne'er-do-well nephew.

And under the gateway, with his back to the wall, Neal found that nephew talking to Mr. Tressider. Joe Webber was, very like his father, in the habit of wearing his hat or cap on his eyebrows, and keeping his hands in his pockets; and it was a little strange that those habits should imply so much that was careless and irresolute in Joe, and so much that was inflexible in Joe's sire.

Joe and Mr. Tressider had only exchanged a few words.

"What do you want here?"

"Waiting for a friend, sir."

"What gentleman attached to my establishment has the honour of your acquaintance?"

"I'm waiting for Mr. Galbraith."

"Your friend, eh?"

"I don't see why he shouldn't be, governor."

Neal came up at this instant, and Mr. Tressider said, almost sharply—

"Do you know this gentleman, Mr. Galbraith?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the less you know of him the better, I fancy."

And Mr. Tressider walked into the counting-house.

"Complimentary," said Joe, shrugging his shoulders, and then screwing himself into a comfortable position against the gateway; "though I don't suppose he sees much good in me—for I don't myself. Well, here I am, prompt and ready for business."

"And sober, Joe?"

"Sober as a judge! Oh! I come round wonderfully, if I'm managed well—the Investment knows how to manage me first-rate—she's too good for me, sir, upon my soul!"

Joe was scarcely up to the mark of judicial sobriety, but he was not incoherent, and he evidently had something to communicate.

"I've brought a letter from——"

"From Carry!" Neal interrupted eagerly—"you have seen her, then?"

"To be sure I have. I slipped into the old

Clarence in the back-yard—the gates are open all day, you know—and I managed to see her. She's kept in a room at the back of the house—her father's locked her in, because he can't trust her. He never could trust his children, somehow."

"The villain! He has no right to treat her with that indignity!" said Neal.

"He's not over-particular how he treats people," replied Joe, carelessly; "he means well enough, I daresay, and he only wants her to marry a chap with a good business—old Sweeny, too, one of the best fellows out."

"Where's the letter?"

"She wrote it off, and dropped it down to me—here you are!"

Neal broke the seal, and read the following hastily-written lines:—

"DEAR NEAL,

"There was a dreadful quarrel—the worst I have ever had—after we got home from the theatre. So bad, that even Mr. Sweeny took my part against my father, and saved me from—blows! I am a prisoner in my room when father is

away from business—at home he is my gaoler, who will have no mercy till I promise to marry whom he pleases. Did you ever hear of a parent locking up his child before, and teaching her, by every mean action, to hate him? I am desperate, Neal. I shall escape, and be at Globe Court to-morrow night. I will live with Joe until you marry me! I am very miserable, and yet—

"Ever yours affectionately,

"CARRY."

"I should like to read that letter when you have done with it," said Joe coolly.

"It concerns you partly—here it is."

Joe read it carefully, and then scratched his head.

"She's a young silly—she's always in such a hurry about things, and I never could understand people in a hurry. Why, I don't believe she's eighteen—not quite eighteen yet."

"Eighteen, weeks ago."

"That's very young to kick over the traces; and she isn't like a man, who can rough it," he said thoughtfully. "You're fond of her?"

"Fond of her!" cried Neal; "I'd die for her!"

"You're not such an old one, either—a queer

couple, you two, as ever came together—I can't make either of you out!"

"Your wife was speaking of a license—can we obtain one without opposition?"

"Lor bless you, yes! Will you leave it to me to manage?"

"I am in your hands."

"And you are inclined to chance it? You'll marry Carry at once?"

"To be sure I will."

"She can't live with me long—she'd be more comfortable with you than that. You'll make her a good husband, I fancy; and she's as light and gay as a fairy, when she's happy. That you won't mind, heavy as you look, somehow."

"I am oppressed with heavy and uncertain thoughts, Joe."

"All right. When will you come with me, and get this license?"

"Now."

"That's sharp work," said he, deliberating for a moment. "Praps it's as well—if you've both made up your minds, I don't see what there is to wait for? And if she runs away from home, why, it's best settled at once."

"A hundred times best."

"Come on, then."

Neal ran back to beg leave of absence for an hour, and then set forth with Joseph Webber towards Doctors Commons, Joseph arranging his toilet by the way, buttoning his seedy coat to the chin, and bringing a rusty black neckerchief from under his ear to the front.

"This is left to me, and you mustn't interfere, mind."

"I know nothing of the formula; I am in your hands."

"And whatever I say, take it coolly, Mr. Galbraith, please, or you'll spoil all."

"Whatever you say?"

"Yes, or you lose Carry, you see."

Neal did not see anything very clearly, but Joseph Webber seemed well up in matters as arranged at Doctors Commons. Neal was in a mist, and went on blindly; he could think of nothing save that Carry might escape him; the picture of Carry, a prisoner in her father's house, filled him with too much rage to think coolly of his prospects.

They went on, each silent and thoughtful, Joseph

Webber swaying a little in his walk, but keeping his hands in his pockets and striding rapidly onwards. They were at Ludgate Hill, and proceeding under the famous archway at last. The men with the aprons were deceived by them—quick of scent as these ghastly touters are—and let them pass, till Joe turned back and spoke to one. Then Neal, Joe, and the man went on together, the man running a few steps in advance, and finally ushering them into a little shop, where there was nothing to sell, and behind the counter of which a red-nosed clerk was eating sandwiches.

"Is Mr. Spoonbill upstairs? Wedding license, sir."

Mr. Spoonbill was upstairs, and Neal and Joseph Webber went upstairs together after a few minutes' delay, and found Mr. Spoonbill behind his table—a suave and sandy man, who was ready at once to open this new account with Hymen.

He looked from one to the other with a faint air of surprise, but he had had great experience in human kind, and there was little to astonish him in that way now.

"A license?—oh! yes, we can soon settle that little matter. Name of bridegroom—you are the bridegroom, I presume?" to Neal.

Neal nodded, and furnished the proctor with his name and address, age and parish, Joseph Webber correcting his age for him by saying twenty-one, much to Neal's amazement.

"You were born on the first of Jannary, 18— why, of course you were!"

This particular proctor took matters very easily. They might state what age they pleased, it was a matter of no concern to him, so that he got his fees. People who came after licenses said all kinds of things—just what suited their convenience—and swore all kinds of things were true, which were not.

He went on coolly and complacently.

"Twenty-one years of age—Southwark parish—Southwark Church, of course?" he said, filling in with great rapidity.

The full particulars concerning the bride were entered into by Joseph Webber, who spoke with great preciseness.

Caroline Webber was her name, eighteen was her age, Globe Court was her residence, and Southwark her parish. She was an orphan; her father and mother had been both Webbers of Westminster, and he was her legal representative, her

brother Joseph Webber, nearest relation living. The gentleman writing in these details, or part of them, guessed at the story. Joseph Webber had made a good match for his sister, or his sister had got into trouble, poor thing, and the young rascal before him had been made to do justice to the wronged one; something or other of that sort, most likely!

"This way, gentlemen."

Neal sat horrified at all this lying—he had writhed in his chair and clenched his hands, but he could not say anything, and they were not *his* lies, at least. The worst was over, Neal thought, and he and Joe went downstairs and across the street with Mr. Spoonbill into another empty kind of shop, where two gentlemen were sitting, and to whom Mr. Spoonbill immediately began to state his business and show his papers.

Neal sat oppressed at the chest, and more bewildered than ever. Some one put in his hands a book—a Bible—and proceeded to administer an oath to him. He set his teeth hard, murmuring an unintelligible sentence, when one of the gentlemen said briskly,

"Kiss the book."

Neal bent his head forwards, then drew back suddenly and returned the book; but the oath was taken as delivered, and there were no vigilant eyes upon him—every one was busy or indifferent, and dreamed of nothing out of the common way. Neal's license was granted, and Neal went across to Mr. Spoonbill's quarters and paid his fees, and was wished by that gentleman every happiness in life.

He came out into the daylight pale and fierce.

"I did not know that you expected me to perjure myself, Joe Webber," he said; "there can be no happiness for me after all these awful falsehoods."

"Bless you, they're nothing," said Joe; "everybody tells them here, and they don't affect the marriage—nothing affects that. They don't care what you say—it's all a matter of form; if you had told them that you were going to marry a pig-faced lady of ninety, and that you were a hundred and two, they would have thought it all right and square. And where's the harm of it all?—it's true enough that you and Carry are to be man and wife."

"I hope so—but what a way to obtain a wife!"

"It's all her father's fault."

"Ah! that it is," and Neal consoled himself with that assurance, although the ugly black untruths to which it had been supposed he had sworn, rose up before him, and marred his satisfaction.

Joe and he separated, Neal promising to call very early to-morrow, and wait at Joe's house till Carry came—Joe promising, on his part, to let Neal know if anything should transpire in the interim. They separated near Southwark Church, whither Neal had repaired to give notice to the parish clerk of a wedding the day after to-morrow. Neal had made up his mind, and all was settled, so far as he was concerned! If Carry did not appear to-morrow night, why, it was but a postponement of the day, and if she did appear, there lay the one course open to bring happiness to them both.

He went back to business more absorbed than ever, weighed down more heavily by the new thoughts which had come to him. With his happiness so fast approaching, he wondered that he felt no lighter at heart, and he attributed it all to the petty lying and scheming by which his chance of securing Carry had been obtained. For thoughts of Carry did not deter him, and his father, he knew, would be reconciled very speedily to the

change, and look on Carry as a daughter. The thoughts of what a young couple they should be, and how people would talk about them, only made him feel more confidence in himself, and in the wisdom of his step. And yet he was dull and low-spirited; he had acted for himself in life too long to seek advisers, but in his heart he yearned for one clear-headed, clever friend, such as his father might have been had not a law-suit turned his brain.

He had confidence in the wisdom of this step, it is asserted, but its importance shadowed him. Before he was at man's estate, he assumed man's duties, and took unto himself a wife; such precipitancy worldly men had laughed at, and satirized, pitying the haste of both man and woman; he wished that he could call to mind one who had ever commended it. And after all, he knew so little of Carry—no, he would not think that! He knew how dearly and madly he loved her, and if she did not shrink from trusting herself with him, why should he hesitate a moment, young as he was? So he had confidence in himself, and in his mode of action, though he could not keep the shadows down.

He went home moodily. He woke the next morning restlessly; he went away from office in the afternoon with more excitement, with still more embarrassment.

"As we are not very busy, Mr. Pike, I am going to ask for a holiday to-morrow."

"Very well—you can have it."

Mr. Pike did not refer him to Mr. Tressider, but gave him the requisite permission. He was perfectly assured that Neal Galbraith could be spared.

"I—I may not take the holiday, but come here at nine in the morning just the same."

"Not certain, then?"

"Not quite, sir."

And then Neal beat a retreat, lest Mr. Pike's curiosity should once more revive to disturb him. Neal went to Globe Court with a beating heart, and found only the giantess at home, ironing again at her immortal muslin, and preparing for conquest over all other monstrosities at Basingstoke Fair.

"No Carry?"

"Why, not yet, afore it's dark, I should think. Will you sit down and wait for her?"

"No, I'll return presently."

Neal went home to Fife Street, had tea with his father, and then rose to withdraw once more.

"Going out again, Neal?" said the old man, plaintively.

"Yes, to-night, on business."

"How busy they always are at Hopeful's!"

"A few more days, and it will all be over," said Neal, confusedly; "and then we shall settle down, you and I, and everything will be so much better and brighter!"

"How's that?" asked Mr. Galbraith, with more sharpness than our hero had bargained for.

"I can't explain, exactly. I think it will—I'm sure it will!"

"Neal, you have something to tell me?"

Our hero was not prepared for his father's acuteness. During the last fortnight he had not observed his father too closely, and there had been "a growing difference" in his favour still. Neal saw that now.

"I shall have something to tell you to-morrow that will please you, father. At least"—he corrected—"I hope I shall."

"You think that it will be good news, then?"

"Yes—good news!"

"And you don't want to render me too sanguine by its precipitate announcement? Always careful, Neal—how much I owe to you!"

"No, sir—you owe me nothing. And you must forgive me all my little secrets—they are kept back for your good."

"I know that, Neal."

"And if I haven't gone into the plans lately, and have disappointed you now and then by not looking at them,"—Neal remembered suddenly setting the last "idea" aside in haste, and rushing from the house,—"we'll make it all right presently, and have a long evening or two with the arrears."

"Thank you, Neal—you're always considerate. And I really think that I have hit upon a good idea at last. A good and practical idea, my boy."

"We'll work at it next week."

After these assuring words, and leaving his father bright and cheerful at his work, Neal went back to Globe Court, and announced his presence at Mr. Joseph Webber's house.

It was past eight o'clock, and freezing again. The winter would not go away that year!

The door opened, and a pale, large-eyed girl,

whom, for the instant, he did not recognize for Carry, held him by both hands, and laughed hysterically.

"It's all over, Neal—I've come!"

"God bless you, Carry! I thought you would!"

They went into the parlour, and sat down side by side, Carry holding one of his hands still in hers, dry and feverish.

"How did you escape?" he asked.

"I made no escape," she said; "I came of my own free will—with my father's consent."

"How's that?"

"He taunted me this morning about you—how poor and young you were, and how, even if we married, you and I would grow tired of each other; and I taunted him with his unnatural sternness, and his mode of treatment of me. This evening he altered very much—became cold and stern, and white-faced, just as he was when Joe went wrong. 'Mr. Sweeny's coming to-night,' he said. 'You'll have to decide to-night whether he's worth having. If he isn't, you can go away from here to this Mr. Galbraith, if you like—only you'll never come back again, mind that! I can't break your spirit without killing you—you won't

take my advice—now act for yourself, and there's the door, if you prefer it.'"

"And your mother?"

"She never uttered a word one way or another—she never asked me to consider, to stop—she is as tired of me as my father is."

"And you took them at their word, trusting to me, dear Carry?"

"Yes, I have only you to trust in now!"

"Only! am I not sufficient?"

"Yes," she said, hurriedly; "but if we have both been foolish—if you should find out too late that you don't care for me—if you tire of me, Neal—my God! what shall I do?"

"Is it likely that I shall?"

"Oh! we are so young—we are so young!" she wailed; "and I am afraid!"

"Courage!"

"If I went back now, before he has hardly missed me, it might be as well—and yet the terrible alternative of marrying that man!"

"You must marry me to-morrow instead—begin a new life, and a bright one with me—I shall have strength to work for you, and your happiness."

"You don't know me, Neal—you have ever

thought too well of me," she said, sadly; "with you I have not always been myself."

"Yes, you have."

"No, no!" she cried, "you have not seen in me a vain, obstinate, and weak-minded girl, turned by a good word, but rendered callous by a harsh one—loving nothing but herself!"

"Not me, Carry?"

"Well, loving you for your generous thoughts of me, and thinking how hard I will try to do my duty—trying always! I think that I shall succeed, Neal—but if I fail!"

"Oh! we'll not think of failure—that's impossible!"

"I come to you with no secrets, at least—Mr.—Mr. Tressider told you all about me and him—you said so, Neal—you know that once I thought of him too much!"

"He told me of that old flirtation—I don't think that I am a jealous man. What has Mr. Tressider to do with you or me now?"

"Nothing. I don't wish it—it's all past, that folly—and here is reality, and you and I are going to marry each other to-morrow. All so sudden, so unlifelike, and yet—*so true!*"

"You are excited now—you are depressed at this rapidity of action. We shall never be composed till we are married, Carry. I wish it were to-morrow morning, now!"

"You will go away until the morning, Neal," she urged; "I will meet you at the church, and Joe shall give me away. I have so much to do, and can't spare an instant now."

"I am unreasonable, Carry," said our hero, rising; "but don't distress yourself about a dress, or anything of that kind—let me see your dear self, that's all I care about!"

Before he went away, he said—

"And your father? He might come to Mrs. Higgs's."

"No—I read in his face that he would not move a step to bring me back. He don't care for *me*—he never did!"

Our hero went away somewhat reluctantly, and yet with less heaviness at his heart than suspense had set there during the last three days. It was settled—they were to be married—all would be well from that hour!

Would he have doubted it had he seen Carry fling herself despairingly towards the giantess, who

had been standing all this time an unheeded witness to their interview?

"Why, Miss Webber—Carry Webber, how you do take on, to be sure!"

"I'm a wretched girl!—sick of home, and glad of the means to escape it. I'm not doing right, after all, but making him miserable as well as me!"

"Why, how can that be, child?"

"It has all happened so suddenly!—I can't believe that he can love me!—no one ever really loved *me* long!—I am like a woman walking in her sleep!"

"Shake it off—why, if I cut this sort of caper, Joe would be ashamed of me. You're going to be married, and ought to feel as happy as the day is long. There, shake it off—it's too late now to fret at anything!"

"Yes, too late!" she said, with her white lips compressed; "let me see about my dress, and get over all this nervousness. There, see how strong I am—why, my hand don't shake much now, does it?"

* * * * * *

Neal Galbraith's courting days were over next morning. Carry Webber met him with her brother

Joseph and the giantess, and he and Carry took each other for better, for worse! They were both looking older than their years warranted, and no one seemed surprised at the youth of this couple. It was a gloomy day, with no sunshine for the bride; and the clergyman, who was an old man, shivered as he made them man and wife. The church was desolate and dark, and the clerk had lighted two burners near the altar, and made the scene more ghastly by the contrast. The frost came into the church through the half-opened doors at the end, where the face of an old woman peered, a woman interested in this match, and who had guessed Neal's mission, and followed him.

As they advanced together, between the rows of pews, yawning like open graves on either side of them, the woman disappeared; coming down the steps, the married couple found her waiting for them.

"I thought it was to-day—I knowed it all along! —I couldn't help following, Master Neal, to give my blessing on you two young people, and to hope the best for both on you!"

END OF BOOK THE SECOND.

BOOK III.

"MARRIED AND SETTLED."

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG COUPLE.

THERE are few of my readers who, at one time or another of their lives, have not met with a very young couple, and been startled or interested by the picture presented. It is always an odd picture—a something *bizarre*—affecting, almost unreal; there are the elements of sublimity as well as of burlesque hovering around it.

We look at the boy and girl affecting to be man and woman, and piece their story out for them, wondering if it came about in this or that wise, and marvelling at their courage or their rashness—their plunge into the great world, where true pity is so scarce! Was it opposition that drew them together, or the folly of two weak minds with no patience to endure or to wait, or the ill advice of people more foolish than they, or the obstinacy that took no advice but went against it

by the rule of contrariety, or the confidence in their own strong love which, beginning early, was, they felt assured, to last for ever—or want of confidence, which feared everything false until the knot was tied, and then feared worse than ever!—or a sheer desire for novelty, or a child's revenge on itself?

Young people have married for all these reasons, for better and for worse ones; they have sunk youth early, and begun the troubles and responsibilities of life before life's knowledge was obtained, knocking their silly heads against the huge hard rock of the Unalterable. They are marriages made in haste; does the proverb always hold good about leisurely repentance?

Not always perhaps—very often, we fear. Here and there amidst the crowd do we meet with those who have been lucky in their young loves, but it is possible that to the question—"Would it not have been better to have waited yet a little while?" the answer would follow in the affirmative. And to those repenting at leisure, who, face to face with each other, find the romance underfoot, and the reality grim and ghoul-like confronting them, what a "Yes" is shrieked forth in despair, sounding

from the grave of dead fancies, like the wail of the lost!

Still, let us not be mistaken. We decry not early marriages, sensible early marriages, before the bloom is off the tree, and whilst the heart is young; in middle-aged folk sidling up to the altar, we hear but the rustle of dried hopes; and the little impulsive bobbings of the hearts that are left them, are a something different and of a lower estate than the tempestuous love-heaving of their juniors. We would have all good people married before thirty, and none before that sensible age, which is termed man's estate. Eighty years between man and woman seem a fair start in these non-marrying times—are they much wiser than the boy and girl we met once on ship-board, whose united ages were thirty-five?

The united ages of Neal and Carry were only thirty-eight, therefore the reader may judge from our foregoing remarks that we are scarcely satisfied with this match. And yet Carry was eighteen years of age—a fair age for a bride in many cases, even in Carry Webber's, had she considered matters, and not been influenced in so great a degree by the events surging round her. Those events had

bewildered her, and she had leaped in the dark towards the first flame in her way, chancing all for a change. Happiness was in her own hands still; but it had never been in her own hands before, and the responsibility of steering her way towards it—through the shoals and quicksands in the way of the few who *have* a chance of happiness—may be too much for Carry. We are watchful of her from the vantage-ground.

We have a better excuse for Neal's actions, rash as they were. He *was* older than his years, we say again; he had kept house and submerged all youth long before his intimacy with Carry Webber; he had the thoughts of a man in all things, save in matters of love; but as a writer of our own day asserts that those matters tend even to make wise men fools, why he might not have stood at a greater disadvantage than other folk. He should have waited, certainly; there would have been greater heroism in the action, and Carry might have borne all, resisted and waited too, with better chances for her in the future. But waiting not, he was still far from a boy when he began house and wife-keeping. He knew the world; he understood the value of money; he was pre-

pared to meet the expenses incidental to his new estate; to live downwards for a year or two honestly, frugally, and contentedly, believing in better times, and happy in that belief, with the bright-faced young wife to sustain him in his efforts. Unlike most young men dashing at wedlock in a hurry, Neal had not shut his eyes to the consequences. He saw them all, and if he acted unwisely in accepting them, he acted deliberately, taking them as part of his bargain, without which he should never have secured Carry. He did not sufficiently consider that Carry had not deliberated; that she had thought too much of her escape from Shepherd Street, and too little of the uphill journey she would have to make with him.

It was the quietest wedding that ever took place in the world, perhaps. There was not a new dress at the altar, there was no wedding-feast, and setting forth, after that feast, on a long journey to be happy in themselves.

Neal parted with his brother-in-law and the giantess, and took Carry on his arm to Fife Street, Mrs. Higgs following behind with a market-basket and a door-key, wiping her eyes with the latter now and then.

Neal and Carry had gone upstairs, and surprised Mr. Galbraith at his plans.

"There is a new daughter for you, sir—to make your hours less lonely when I am at business," said the son. "You will love Neal's wife for Neal's sake now—next week for her own."

The old gentleman set down his pencil, and then swept it, along with his compasses and drawings, on to the floor, leaving a clear table for his arms; then the face paled, and the shock of the surprise was evident enough thereon.

"Neal's—Neal's wife!" he gasped.

"I thought that you would like the facts all at once, sir—suspense would not suit you, yet a while. This will add to everybody's happiness, father."

"I'm—glad—of—that!" he answered slowly.

"And you must bear with me for a few days, sir, until you know me better, and can call me daughter," said Carry submissively and kindly.

Mr. Galbraith rubbed hard at his high, bumpy forehead with both hands, as though to rub the facts in, before he committed himself by a reply.

"You—you must take care of Neal," he said at last, and in a brisker manner.

"Certainly I will."

"And not get tired of me, and make me wretched. I've been very comfortable here along with him, and didn't—didn't expect this!"

Mr. Galbraith drew forth a voluminous handkerchief, and began to flourish it about; to wipe his eyes, and sob a little—finally to produce his snuff-box, and set to work in a wholesale manner at its contents. After this, he picked up his drawing materials, put his table aside, with shaking hands, and took his walking-stick from its corner-place.

"I—I think I'll take a little walk with Mrs. Higgs. I don't feel much inclined for any more work to-day," he said; "and I daresay I'm in the way a little just now."

"Not at all."

"Oh! yes, I am. I shouldn't have liked old people in my way just after I was married, pottering about, and taking snuff, and *whinnicking*. Where's Mrs. Higgs, I wonder?"

And very much confused still, Mr. Galbraith tottered away, found Mrs. Higgs, and asked very submissively to be taken for a walk, because he didn't feel quite the thing, after all this change, he fancied. He sought the company and the solace

of the best friend he had just then, and returned home all the better for his walk.

He came into the drawing-room again, and went at once to Carry, taking her head between his withered hands, and kissing her on the forehead.

"God bless you, my child! Take care of Neal, he's a good young fellow—very."

Then he turned to the good young fellow and kissed him too, Neal laughing and blushing beneath the salute bestowed upon him.

"And God bless you, boy—beginning marriage early, and not telling me anything about it. Why, I might have advised you; and it wasn't as if I hadn't been getting strong and well again."

"Ah! strong and well as ever again shortly. And the three of us all happy together, with nothing to regret, and much to look forward to. My heart never felt so light."

Which it ought to have done, surely. So Neal was happy on his wedding-day; mystery was over, Carry was his wife, and there was peace of mind in Fife Street.

Whether there was peace of mind in Shepherd Street it behoves us to consider. We have to

note the effect of this marriage on most of the characters sketched on our canvas.

There was *not* peace of mind in Shepherd Street.

Neal had sent a note round to the carriage-breaker's, telling Mr. Webber of his daughter's marriage with him that morning, offering him the hand of reconciliation, and asking for an answer by the bearer, a shock-headed Ganymede, who had been taken from his hoop-bowling occupation in Fife Street to convey our hero's message.

Mr. Webber read the letter, putting on for that purpose a pair of bull's-eyed spectacles, which added to his ferocity of expression.

"There's no answer—you can go," he said to the boy, calling him back before he had passed the yellow-bodied barouche to add—"and you may say there never will be any answer—never!"

He went to the foot of the stairs, and commenced roaring forth "Johannah," until Johannah came downstairs; slow, weary, and grim.

"What's the matter with you, creeping downstairs like that?" he asked.

"Nothing's the matter. I never said there was, did I?"

"Then don't make those faces," he adjured.

"I don't see that's any business of your'n, Webber, what faces I put on—not that I was making faces—for I wasn't."

"Yes, you were."

When Mr. Webber and his wife were sitting in the parlour together, the former condescended to impart the news.

"She's done it, Mrs. Webber. She's gone off with that consequential young fool, who thinks himself a gentleman."

"Aint they married?" ejaculated Mrs. Webber.

"Oh! yes, they're married," said Webber; "if that's any comfort to you, they're married; and if they don't come to ruin and disgrace, I shall be disappointed."

"No—don't say that," she said eagerly; "after all, she's our gal!"

"No, she isn't," replied the sterner being facing her, "that's just what she isn't ever again, on any account, whatever happens. We've got our family off our hands pretty early in life, and a nice clear house we've got of it. You and I, Johannah," he added with bitter irony, "will have to enjoy ourselves in it, and be—*jolly!*"

"It all might have been wus," said Mrs. Webber.

"I don't see it."

"You never did see what other people see," said Mrs. Webber acrimoniously; "but she might have gone wrong altogether, like Joe; or Sweeny might have been a brute to her, like you've been to me, Webber—or a hundred things; and though she's been ungrateful, undutiful, flying in everybody's face, and discontented with a comfortable home, still it might have been wus!"

"I never want to see her again—I never will see her again, mind you."

"Do as you please."

"She's every bit as bad as Joe—it was born in both of 'em to be a curse to both of us, and we're well rid of 'em. Don't you ever let her into this house, or I'll have you out of it too—remember that!"

"Where's your law for it?"

"And I'll never, as long as I live, go to see her. And I'll leave every penny of my money to an hospital. Why couldn't she have married Sweeny—a sound, sensible fellow, with two shops, instead of that scowling, *cheeky* young vagabond! To think

that a 'cute man like me should have been a father to such a fool like Carry!"

"Ah! you're over 'cute, Webber," commented his wife.

"I wasn't over 'cute when I married such a fright as you are!" retorted Mr. Webber, as he went from the room, slamming the door violently behind him.

CHAPTER II.

A HOLIDAY.

ON the following day Neal had to confront two criticisms, and he had only bargained for one. The marriage had been performed, and there was no need for further secrecy; he entered the office at the same moment as Mr. Pike, and passed his arm through that worthy gentleman's, as they went up the steps together.

"Mr. Pike, I have some important news for you."

"News!—why, what has happened now?"

"It is the end of the old story, which has perplexed you lately, sir."

"Oh! then—let us have it."

Mr. Pike did not repair to his office stool, but stood by his desk in an attentive attitude. Neal, bright-faced and resolute, dashed at once into his subject:

"You have been disturbed by my embarrassed demeanour, Mr. Pike—I think that you have been troubled too, lest it stood as evidence of my moral decadence."

"Troubled, till you gave me your word, Neal."

"Thank you for placing confidence in it," said Neal; "well, the long and short of it is, that I was married yesterday morning," he said.

"Mar—*what* did you say?"

Mr. Pike would not believe that statement yet awhile, and Neal repeated it:

"I was married yesterday morning," he said.

"Married! God bless me, *you* married! Why, however—whenever—where?"

Mr. Pike's forehead broke into a little perspiration on its own account, and his lustreless eyes stared themselves into a more prominent position. Neal laughed at Mr Pike's dismay.

"*She* was not happy at home, and was likely to be inveigled into a marriage with some one else; so we settled all family disputes by marrying after our own fashion, and beginning life together early."

"I'm very sorry."

"No, you mustn't say that, sir," urged Neal,

"there's nothing to be sorry for—we are both fond of each other—it's a love match—I'm sure that we shall be both as happy as the day is long."

"I hope you will, with all my heart!" said Mr. Pike; "but, God bless my soul, how disappointed I am in you! I took you for a steady matter-of-fact lad, who would proceed soberly in life, thinking not of marriage and giving in marriage, until you were five or six years older, and then choosing some quiet, religious, earnest-hearted kind of girl such as—many *I* could name—and settling down to the peace and rest which hallow a good match. I really did, Neal!"

Mr. Pike bit the finger-nails of his right hand, and looked disconsolately at the floor, like a man who had met with a bitter disappointment somewhere.

"I hope that I shall settle down to peace and rest, sir, a little earlier than usual, that's all."

"Who is she?"

"She *was* a Miss Webber of Shepherd Street—a niece of my landlady."

"These nieces and daughters of lodging-house keepers are very dangerous young women," he said absently.

"Mr. Pike!" cried Neal, with a precipitancy that startled him.

"I—I beg your pardon, Neal," said Mr. Pike, recalled to decorum; "I was speaking generally—I have no doubt that you have chosen wisely and well—you are not likely to have acted hastily in so important a step."

"Not I, sir," said Neal.

"And she is quiet and religious, doubtless. Well, you are very young, but a pure-minded, religious girl at your elbow cannot do you any harm that I know of."

"Harm! I should say not."

"Is she Church of England?—or does she belong to any particular denomination?—it doesn't matter much, if her heart be in God's work."

"Well—I haven't asked her yet what denomination she is," stammered Neal; "but I'll bet ten to one it's the right."

"Bet ten to one on her religious convictions!—great heaven, Neal, what are you talking in that profane way for?"

"I'm a trifle unsettled—you must not mind what I say, Mr. Pike," said Neal; "I would say anything foolish, my heart's so full of happiness. Present-

ly, we can talk about the denominations, sir."

"Ye—es."

Mr. Pike still regarded Neal as a phenomenon difficult to comprehend. He had had great confidence in Neal's practical manner, his sobriety, and judgment, and now Neal was married, and did not seem to know a great deal concerning his helpmate. Mr. Pike went to his desk and commenced work, pausing in an instant to see if Neal were likely to imitate his example, and watching Neal askance when he had done so. Mr. Pike was still disturbed; he dipped his pen on the wrong side and missed the ink-stand more than once; he left off writing to look steadily before him; once or twice a very odd sigh escaped him.

"I wonder," he said at last, "that you can settle down to work so soon, after this great change to you."

"I can't afford to lose any more time, Mr. Pike, or to make Mr. Tressider distrustful of my energy, but—it *is* hard work to day!" replied Neal; "when you're married, Mr. Pike, you'll find it so, if you come to business the day after the wedding."

"When I'm married!" ejaculated Mr. Pike, with visible horror expressed on his countenance;

"I shan't marry—never! I don't agree with people in my circumstances marrying," he added almost sharply.

"You are thinking of Malthus."

"Malthus was an idiot—you'll never be of any good, Neal, if you keep wandering away from your work like this."

"Why, it was you, sir, created this last divergence."

"Was it really!" exclaimed Mr. Pike; "well, that's very singular, to be sure. Be kind enough to call me to order if I behave so foolishly again?"

"All right, sir—and if I should become dreamy myself, I'll ask you to do me a similar favour. What a bright morning it is—and yesterday was raw and cold, and had I treated Carry to a country jaunt, she would have shivered herself to death. You must see my wife, Mr. Pike."

"Certainly, I will."

"You'll like her very much indeed!"

"I don't doubt it."

Then they both went to work at their books, till Mr. Pike suddenly quitted his stool and walked into the inner office, leaving our hero alone with his love thoughts. Neal had forgotten Mr. Pike and

his master's business, when the senior clerk returned.

"Mr. Tressider wishes to speak to you, Neal," said Pike.

"To speak to me? I say, Mr. Pike, you haven't told him anything about it?"

"I—I certainly mentioned it in the course of conversation. It was not a secret, I suppose?"

"No," said Neal; "I'm proud of my elevated position in the social scale; but——"

"But what?"

"But I shan't be able to stand *his* remarks very well," nodding his head towards the inner office, "if he put on the acrimonious vein!"

"Oh! he don't mean half what he says," said Mr. Pike. "I don't mind him—why should you?"

"I rather object to solemn chaff," said Neal. "But here goes—and I won't mind him more than I can help."

Neal repaired to the office of his master, finding Mr. Tressider not yet settled down to business there, but sitting before the fire, with his hands spread out to the blaze, and his dressing-gown drawn tightly round him.

"Good morning, Galbraith," he said. "Mr. Pike tells me that you want another holiday."

"I never said so," exclaimed the maligned young husband.

"No, he said you never said so, but I suppose you looked so, and therefore worried that sensitive gentleman. Pike's getting a bit of a nuisance—eh?"

"No, sir—not that I perceive."

"He's a smuggler!"

"What, sir?"

"He smuggles in suggestions to one's moral behaviour, as though he were the only moral being left upon God's earth. I can't say that I particularly admire Mr. Pike, but then *Nil admirari* is a motto of mine. He's a good clerk—and I shall give him an excellent character."

He had said this in a lower voice, but Neal could not refrain from a rejoinder, in his great surprise.

"Why! you do not think of Mr. Pike quitting your service, Mr. Tressider?"

"He may think of quitting mine!" said Mr. Tressider, mildly. "You needn't be so quick in catching up one's subdued remarks, young gentle-

man. But then, you're a sharp man. Mr. Pike tells me that you were married yesterday."

"Yes, sir."

"I never could make up my mind to undergo the ordeal," said Mr. Tressider, "and I am amazed at your courage and audacity. You have begun life early."

"And well, sir."

"That remains to be proved, oh! prophet," said Mr. Tressider. "He is something like a wise man, or a wise-acre—it's all the same, I believe—who foretells his own prosperity. I was not very much unlike you when I was young—I took the fleeting impressions of the moment, especially when they were pleasant ones, for lasting. I could see them stretching away, strong and bright, in the future—far away beyond my ken, always the same, hopes lit by a sun ever bright in the heavens. I don't know now a more miserable wretch than I, Mr. Galbraith, so take me for your moral."

"There is a future still ahead, sir, and, according to your own reasoning, it may be very different from the present."

"You hope it may, of course!" he sneered; "just to deprive you of the opportunity of point-

ing me out as the man who beggared your father, and then came to grief himself!"

"I wish you no harm, sir," said Neal. "I am trying to forget the past."

"I hope that you will succeed—but you will have quite enough to occupy you with the present, I daresay," he added. "Well, who's the bride?"

"Miss Webber."

"Eh?"

He looked up with more intentness than he was in the habit of displaying. Neal repeated the maiden name of his wife.

"Webber?—girl from Shepherd Street—played *Desdemona* at Jennings's—oh! yes, I remember the girl well. Rather pretty, I think?"

"Very pretty, sir."

"No—rather pretty. A good skin stretched over unclassical features, that's all," said Mr. Tressider. "You can take a holiday to-day, Galbraith."

"Thank you, sir."

"Thank Pike, not me, he's the ruling genius here. I wish that he would give me a holiday more often than he does. Oh! by the way, Galbraith, I have heard from my nephew—he desires to be remembered to you."

"He is very kind. I hope that he sends good news, sir."

"Pretty fair in its way. He's a little bit sanguine just now; but I have not read the letter very attentively. He'll be at the lowest ebb in three months—I never knew a greater idiot in my life! What are you stopping for?"

"I beg pardon—good morning."

"'Gather the roses whilst you may,' young Benedict—it's devilish soon that the thorns outgrow the blossoms! And *do* shut the door, behind you," he added, querulously; "you and Pike are terrible fellows for leaving it ajar."

Neal saw him turning to the fire, and cowering over it somewhat, as he went out of the room to thank Pike for the holiday that had been procured for him.

He went home at once, and bade Carry prepare for her expedition. Husband and wife sallied forth in high spirits, in search of the roses to which Mr. Tressider had alluded. Their funds were not large, and their journey was necessarily short; but it was a very happy day—Neal thinks of it still. They went to Greenwich Park, which they had almost to themselves that March morning—Green-

wich Park, famous haunt of "the masses," and capital of all the pleasure-grounds in Cockneydom. Greenwich Park at all seasons, and under all aspects, worth visiting in search of the ideal. For the first time in their lives, these young people had the clear day to themselves—they were both at their best, each grateful to the other for the bestowal of new life—each in a new world, without a frown from the old one, to mar the rejoicing. It mattered not to them that the air was keen in the park, or that the trees were leafless—the sky was bright, the sun was shining, there were birds singing amongst the branches, and the hill and dale were green and fresh as their loves. Surely they were boy and girl that day, and *younger* than their years?—they stood apart from trouble, they were all in all to each other, the cares were for the past or for the after days, not then! Neal had not seen Carry at her best until that day; her silvery laugh made his heart thrill, and seemed to vie with the music of the birds; she was capricious, witty, gay, and in all three so lovable. And Neal was different also, for he thought only of his young wife, and the heaviness of feature stole away from his face, and left him bright and hand-

some—a young man to be loved for himself, as she had loved him before, Carry thought, for his chivalry.

When they were tired of wandering from hill to dale, and were seated side by side, and hand in hand, they looked more like boy and girl than ever; and when she rested her head upon his shoulder, with his protecting arm thrown round her, it was the boy's action—and very unlike the Neal Galbraith we have portrayed, and have to portray—to look away from her, and, whilst thanking God for the happiness dawning so early upon him, to let the tears escape him.

Poor Neal! He looks back still at this day—there is no escaping it—the blue sky deepening over head, the shadows lengthening on the grass, the fair woman at his side, free from the old home, happy in her freedom, and confident in him, and the tears are in his eyes again.

CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE DIFFERENCE.

WE are not about to trace step by step the progress of this couple; scarcely on the threshold of our story-proper, we have not space allotted to us for so close an analysis. Given the subject, and the space, and a detailed career of these two young housekeepers, might afford interest, and remain, if we did our work well, for ever a moral worthy the attention of beginners.

A map of these two lives would be the map of that little unknown sea, on which many set forth young as these two; here the quicksands where that ship was wrecked, and here the coast of self-will, crowded with danger-signals, flashing out, "keep back;" and there the spot where the *Good Intent* went down, and all hands lost! Neal and Carry sobered by degrees—Fife Street was to remain their home, until such time as Neal should

have saved money to begin housekeeping on his own account. Carry was content with this—or, if not content, she accepted it as part of her new estate; blindly she had not made one step towards it.

Carry was happy for the first few weeks; there were no barriers in the way; the change was good for her—here she was loved, respected, even obeyed. It was a new world, in which she could rejoice; it was pleasant to be mistress within doors, and then to sally forth towards the evening in search of Neal, meeting him in his homeward route, and coming back with him.

If they did not have their evenings entirely to themselves, that was a minor affair, and troubled not Neal. Neal's father was part of the establishment, taken with Neal for better or worse—an old gentleman, who had always been manageable since his illness.

Here perhaps the first faint cloud arose—there are clouds in the heaven of the happiest marriages, and they are not wise people who murmur at infinitesimal shadowings. The reader has been very often with Neal to business, followed Neal in his courting days, and has taken Neal's view of the

father; but there are two sides to all questions, and now there were two sides to the character of Galbraith the Inventor.

In his affluent days, Mr. Galbraith had been an obstinate, proud, irritable little man, chafing at minor difficulties, and rendering his brain sensitive by the way in which he received them. A good, honest, open-hearted man, but a sensitive plant, as are all inventors, except inventors of story-books, and they are the most gentle creatures on earth! Galbraith was aware of his failing, and in old days could lock himself in with it in his study, where it worried not his wife and child, when plans went wrong, and models would not come right. When the law-suit set in—the last great law-suit, in which victory ended in ruin—his obstinacy, or his perseverance, reduced him to his last shilling, as his irritability led his brain to the verge, and toppled it over. Then his weakness came, and he was a new Galbraith, dependent on others, looking for strength and support from the son ever faithful to him. There were no signs of the old irritabilities after that affliction, until his mind grew stronger, and his thoughts took shape once more. Then, with the old ideas, came back some rem-

nants of the old character; although Neal, absent from business all day, knew not of the change. He was proud of his father's clearer mind and greater strength, but he guessed nothing of his father's fretfulness over his schemes, and only exulted with him when they approximated to a something almost like comprehensiveness.

Let the truth be told, then, that at times Mr. Galbraith was affected by obstinate or disagreeable moods, lasting for a little while, and easily dissipated, perhaps, but none the less objectionable. To these old weaknesses was added a new cunning, that concealed them from Neal, of whom he had grown somewhat afraid, as the wrecked mind ever fears its custodian.

Carry Galbraith, who had heard so often from Neal of her father-in-law's docility, was therefore a little surprised by the evidence afforded now and then to the contrary. Mr. Galbraith, senior, was not always the meek, uncomplaining old gentleman, she had been led to expect; and though, as a rule, he was kind, yet there were certain exceptions thereto, in which he was singular. He was tenacious on the matter of his plans, and as he had a habit of mislaying his portfolio and losing his

pencils, his plans rendered him irritable. Then he wanted one table all to himself by the window, and began to feel the contrast between the past and the present, and in Neal's absence to grumble at it just a little.

"I suppose I shall never have a room entirely to myself again," he would murmur; "they were something like times when I could turn the key in the lock of my study, and not be heard of for hours. Now, I'm distracted by the rustle of dresses, the clearing up of tea-things, even your singing, Caroline, though I like your voice, I must say that; and it's hard to fix one's thoughts, especially as they don't come quite so freely as they used."

Carry was trying hard to love the old gentleman, and she and her father-in-law were on very good terms together; but there were times and seasons with Carry—have we not hinted as much already, or had it hinted to us by our characters?—when she was inclined to be irritable herself. She would have been a wonderful woman had she been free from all the failings of both father and mother.

"Presently, when Neal becomes richer, we shall

have a house of our own, Mr. Galbraith, and I am sure Neal's first thought will be a 'study' for you," said Carry kindly, for she was in one of her best moods that morning.

"Oh! no, it won't," said the old gentleman, quickly—"it is not likely that I can expect that now. Neal's a married man, and has your whims to study, not his father's. I wonder who has been moving my H. B. pencil?—I put it on the mantelpiece last night."

Mr. Galbraith stood on tiptoe, and looked all over the mantelpiece—no, some one had moved his H. B. since the preceding evening.

"And as for Neal getting richer—God bless him!" he said, suddenly desisting in his search, and looking round at Carry—"that's a chance! Clerks don't rise very rapidly—at least, they did not in my days—and the supply is greater than the demand, and that settles the question. Besides, there's one more to keep now, and we did not find the housekeeping easy to arrange before—Neal never told me so, but I knew it. He was afraid of my head, as if it were not as strong as ever now, only he won't see it. You may depend upon it, Caroline, that that H. B. has gone down-

stairs along with the tea-things—you flounce about with things so!"

Carry went to the mantelpiece, and found the lead-pencil behind a mutilated shepherd in a violet doublet—the centre ornament, and one of the furnishing "properties" of Mrs. Higgs.

"Oh! I thought that I had looked there, my dear," he said, brightening up at the discovery. "I can't make out how I managed to miss it—I'm not generally so foolish—on the mantelpiece after all, was it?—dear, dear, how very singular! I knew I put it there—I said so—I always know where I put my things," he added, quite egotistically.

He forgot his remarks on housekeeping, and Neal's prospects, on the instant; the rest of the day he was courteous and conciliatory, but this was the first shaft aimed at Carry, and, though she disguised all evidence of the wound, it had struck home. She had anticipated all sunshine with her secret marriage, and she, not reading accurately her father-in-law's character, fancied that he looked upon her as a new incumbrance that had risen in the way of his peace and Neal's progress. Highly sensitive she was ever, and she shed a few tears over Mr. Galbraith's hard words long after he had

forgotten them. Highly proud, too, for she kept this little incident to herself; Neal should not say that she worried him with complaints when he came home tired from Shad Thames. Presently she should become used to Mr. Galbraith, and fall into his ways better. She should manage him, she considered, but, alas! Carry had been never a good tactician in her maiden days, or even with Mr. and Mrs. Webber she might have found more content.

Carry had one more difficulty to contend with in the early days—that of the well-meant advice of Mrs. Higgs. Mrs. Higgs was a relation, and an old friend, to whom she could reply without loss of dignity—in days anterior to our first chapter, there had been more than one battle of words between them. Mrs. Higgs's heart was set on the well-being of this young couple—the son of the man she had served faithfully had married her own niece, and it should not be her fault if happiness did not evolve from the union. So, in the early days she seized every opportunity of offering advice to Carry, —advice concerning Neal's peculiar temperament, which she affected to understand better than Carry; advice about a wife's duty to her husband;

a woman's method as to the conduct of an establishment of which she found herself the head; lectures on the art of giving way and gaining a greater victory by submission; appealing indirectly to Carry's feelings, which she knew by heart, but blundering in her method of delivery, and rousing rather than subduing, the fault of ninety-nine out of a hundred of advisers.

"Oh! I shall know how to act for my own happiness and Neal's," said Carry, a little pertly; "I'm not a child now."

"No, Carry; but I can't 'pect you to have changed your natur' with your name, and you *were* a little too quick afore you married."

"When I am proceeding with too great a velocity, call me to order, aunt—not before. You know, I never could bear lecturing," said Carry, walking upstairs with some dignity.

The second little difference between Mr. Galbraith and Carry occurred when Carry was not in her best mood, and so made *all* the difference. Carry had fallen into housekeeping difficulties, as young housekeepers with limited means will do, and was restless and excitable herself that day. The week's money, carefully allotted and considered,

had run out before its time, and there is no domestic trouble that sours the temper of the wife like that. Carry had been studying all the morning whither the money had flown, had consulted her rough book of expenditure, in which she had forgotten to enter several items, and now could not recall them to mind. The fact was positive that the money was out, but the evidence of its expenditure was negative, and therefore harassed Carry. She had not spent a penny in waste; she had given up the idea of a new pair of gloves for next Sunday, because the grocer had brought a pound of tea, in mistake for half-a-pound, and she was too proud to send it back, as though doubling the supply of Bohea were a matter worth considering; she had even detected a flaw in the baker's account, and defeated the man with his own figures; but still there was money missing, and not to be accounted for. She would not worry Neal with her housekeeping trouble—I am sure she has the respect of every male reader for that resolution—she would wait for her next week's money and make up the amount by extra economy, pinching herself in some way or other when Neal was out and knew nothing about it.

Young couples like Neal and Carry, unless their incomes have been something exceptional, have all had these housekeeping cares, these breakers ahead in the sea of their bliss. They rendered Carry fidgety; her mother had had the housekeeping to manage in Shepherd Street, and, though there were daily differences with Mr. Webber, Carry was blameless, and only knew that money was always ready when necessary. But now, money could not be ready without levying black mail on Neal's next quarter's salary; and Neal was a keen critic, who went into accounts once a fortnight, just to make sure that matters in Fife Street were straight. Last Saturday Neal had complimented her on being the best and most clever of housekeepers; but if, on Saturday week, there was a deficit, though he would not utter one reproach, she was assured that it would render him thoughtful. If she could only ascertain where the money had gone, she would be able to decrease her expenditure; but, according to her hasty balance-sheet, struck off on the back of a letter, there should have been money in hand, and that *was* aggravating enough surely, without having Mr. Galbraith suddenly take to his airs.

Mr. Galbraith, we may remind the reader, had two portfolios, one for plans that had been worked out and set aside—plans which Neal, be it remembered, always considered consigned for ever to oblivion. Mr. Galbraith was to forget the old ideas in his search for new ones; and this rule had held good till his mind gathered strength in Fife Street, and his memory did not so readily betray him.

Mr. Galbraith, on this very day of perplexity to Carry, suddenly remembered an idea—one of his best ideas!—that he had worked at a month since. There had been the usual failing in the machinery, and it had been set aside for further consideration, which Mr. Galbraith now suddenly thought of affording to it.

Mr. Galbraith went upstairs to his room, leaving Carry still at her balance-sheet, on the back of an old letter, her fair hair pushed back, and her white forehead dented with the lead pencil, with which she was gently hammering it. She should remember presently what had become of that four and ninepence halfpenny! Mr. Galbraith left the room serene and complaisant; he returned the reverse of those desiderata. He had been hunting

about in his room for the big portfolio, and had failed to find it; he had been stooping under the bed, and struck his forehead, which was always in the way, against the corner of a box there; he had made his head ache, and covered himself with dust; even his snuff-box had fallen out of his coat pocket, and rolled under the bed again, just as he had got up, and was trying to straighten himself. Then he had walked into Neal's room, and found the portfolio, which Neal had put behind the drawers for precaution's sake, and he had come, staggering beneath its burden—for it had grown heavy with abortions—to the stairs, down which he had dropped it, and sent a snow-storm of papers over the floor.

Mr. Galbraith swore at this. It was the first honest "damn it!" that he had given way to in Fife Street, and Neal's heart might have rejoiced to hear it so firmly enunciated.

Carry was still at the balance-sheet, when he came in, red and flustered, with the portfolio open, and a mountain of papers in his arms.

"You might have heard the row at the 'Elephant!'" he said tetchily, "and you wouldn't leave off to come and help me!"

Carry had been absorbed, and had heard nothing.

"What is the matter?"

"Oh! nothing—nothing! Never mind me—I'm an incumbrance," he said; "I can't have a place to keep my things together in this house!"

"Yes, you can."

"My portfolio always stood there by the fireplace, before you came!" he said. "I suppose it's in the way, like me, and you have had it taken upstairs?"

"No, I did not have it taken upstairs!" said Carry indignantly. "Neal thought that it had better go there."

"Neal never thought so before he married!" grumbled the old gentleman; "he's full of new thoughts now. He don't pay any attention to me, and you're—you're setting him against me. I know you are!—I always thought you would!"

"Mr. Galbraith, you're unjust!" cried Carry—"you're not kind to me!"

"Who's kind to me now, Mrs. Galbraith?" he said; "why, nobody! It would be much better if I had a room of my own somewhere. I'm too old to be worried by new faces—I'm much better by my-

self! I thought that you would give me my own way, just as Neal did; but you hide my portfolio —and I'm mistaken in you!"

"I have been mistaken in you!" said Carry, losing all patience. "I was told that you were all that was kind and gentle—and you're ill-tempered and unjust!"

The old gentleman swayed from his heels to his toes to consider this, with his large top-heavy forehead, increased so much in magnitude by a bump thereon, recently acquired, that it seemed doubtful if it would not overbalance him.

"Ill-tempered and unjust!" he quoted slowly; "they're hard words—I'll go to my room and think them over. Neal never called me names like that!"

He left his papers on the table and floor, and walked very uprightly from the room.

Carry watched his departure half indignantly, and half inclined to burst into tears; she was still far from composed when Neal returned, and found her still alone in the drawing-room, surrounded by an ocean of papers.

"Why, what's this, Carry!"

"Nothing—only your father and I have had a

few words—silly words enough on both sides—about that portfolio."

"Words—you two!" said Neal, aghast. "Why, I have never had words with him in my life. What has it all been about to disturb him?—ever so gentle."

"Gentle with you—not always with me, Neal!"

"You don't understand him," said Neal; "I must not have him misunderstood, or harassed," he added firmly.

Carry could not brook firmness—that roused her own obduracy, and revived the Shepherd Street battles. Alas! she was far from a heroine!

"You misunderstand him, not I!" said Carry, indignantly; "he taunts me with my intrusion here, and I cannot have that, Neal—I will not have it!"

"You forget how weak he is," said Neal; "and will not make allowance for an infirmity scarcely cured yet. Carry, you must be more generous to my old father."

"He is not generous to me—you take his part, and not mine—you, Neal!"

"I will be peacemaker—can I take a better part

than that, Carry?" he said, more softly; "where is he?"

"Upstairs."

Neal went upstairs, and found his father in his bed-room, lying full length on the bed, sobbing violently, and with his face buried in his silk handkerchief.

"What, father!—you like this!"

The old man struggled into a sitting posture, and caught his son's hand.

"She says that I'm ill-tempered and unjust, and —and—all manner of things!" he sobbed; "I knew what it would be, when you married on the sly like—this! She'll work me out of the house—and—I—I—I can't get on with—out you!"

"Patience—you will understand each other better presently—this is only the beginning."

"Of trouble—right, Neal."

"No—we will not have any trouble," said Neal, confidently; "we have dropped trouble with our old life, sir, and we have but to bear and forbear now. You'll love Carry as your own daughter!"

"No, I'm sure I shan't!" was the quick reply; "you should have married a lady—a lad like you!"

"She is a lady—one of the best—you'll see that presently. Why, I have all my father's judgment to lead me in my choice—it's an inheritance!"

"You're—you're no fool, Neal—I know that!"

"And you might have been a little in the wrong, just for once," said Neal, soothingly; "I have known wiser people than you, even in the wrong sometimes. Carry's a sensitive girl—and perhaps you *were* a little harsh."

"I don't remember. I don't think that I was. I couldn't find the portfolio, certainly, and I hit my head looking for it—but I—I wasn't at all put out!"

"It's all a mistake—then you will come down to tea?"

"N—no, Neal," said Mr. Galbraith, inclined to evince his obstinacy even to his son—he was so rapidly returning to his own self.

"I say 'Yes!'" said Neal, very decisively.

Mr. Galbraith cowered when the stronger mind asserted its will. He was submissive, even scared.

"If you wish it, then. But she must not give me any more black looks—oh! how black she can look, Neal!"

"We can all look black at times," said Neal, in reply; "there, I expect you down in five minutes, your own cheerful self. This is the first and last misunderstanding between my father and—my wife!"

"I'm sure I—I don't want to misunderstand her!" whimpered Mr. Galbraith.

"In five minutes, then," reminded his son; "I have a good deal to tell you. I have brought you an invitation to an evening party, for one thing."

"What's—what's that?"

Neal went away laughing; he returned to the drawing-room, to find no laughing face there, however. Carry had been brooding upon her wrongs, upon the preference which Neal had appeared to evince for his father.

"Carry," he said, advancing to her, and taking a seat by her side, "the old gentleman's cut up by this little difference—you must remember, for my sake, how weak he is."

"You will think of him more than me, Neal."

"Is that likely?"

"Yes, it is."

"When I do, upbraid me, Carry," said Neal, stealing his arm round her; "we will not bring the

night upon us by vain forebodings—you are my wife, to keep it away by your love!"

"Oh! Neal," she said, turning to him, clinging round his neck, and crying there; "always love me, always give me kind words, and make me grateful for them. Remember, how lonely I am without you—how there is only you to trust in!"

CHAPTER IV.

MR. PIKE'S TEA-PARTY.

NEAL'S assertion respecting an invitation to his father was strictly correct. Neal was the bearer of Mr. Pike's compliments and requests as to the pleasure of the senior Mr. Galbraith's company at a small tea-party on the 8th of June, 18—. Neal and his wife had been invited, and Neal's father was particularly requested to accompany them.

"I do not see what good I can be," said old Mr. Galbraith.

"Mr. Pike has an idea that a change will be good for you," explained Neal; "besides, you and he are both in the scientific line, and will agree together exceedingly well."

"But I can't bear a crowd. Will there be any one else?"

"Two or three steady-going neighbours—that's all."

"Well, perhaps it will be a change. It will do you good, Caroline—you're looking quite pale this afternoon."

Mr. Galbraith had forgotten the disturbing elements of an hour since; his invitation to tea had altered the tenor of his thoughts—tea with a gentleman, too, who was in the scientific line. On the 8th of June, then, Carry and her father-in-law met Neal at the foot of London Bridge, and the three went by omnibus to Bethnal Green. Mr. Pike, full of his party, had left Neal to the entire management of the office at an early hour.

"It's not a habit of ours to give parties," Mr. Pike had said, an hour or two previously, as he prepared to depart, "but Addie and I have been anxious to get you, your wife and father to Crow Street, to meet one or two friends of the right sort. People that you ought to know, and take a fancy to, Neal."

Neal said something about Mr. Pike's friends being always friends of his—and, indeed, Neal was beginning to understand Mr. Pike, and amidst

the quiet, old-fashioned ways of his fellow-clerk, to detect the true friend and the good man. He knew that Mr. Pike was interested in him and his welfare, and he was grateful for that interest. Mr. Pike was certainly a curious man, anxious to sift to the bottom of all mystery; to be curious about Neal's wife, Neal's father, Neal's mode of living even, was only a fellow-clerk's way of showing his interest awkwardly.

But then Mr. Pike was naturally a little awkward. It would have been better for all parties, perhaps, had he taken his niece's advice, and received only the Galbraiths on the eighth; but he was also naturally economic, and there were return invitations due to a few of his chapel friends, and no misgivings as to the incongruous materials he might bring together in consequence. Particular friends of his, brought together, would always be friendly with one another, he thought; but then this was his first re-union, and he had not had the benefit of experience.

The Galbraiths were the second arrivals, the first being an old lady converted from heathenism and antagonism to the human race, and brought to a sense of her condition, and an awful despon-

dency in consequence. To this lady, tall, thin, and frightfully erect, Pike immediately introduced the new-comers, who were scared, especially Mr. Galbraith senior, by a solemn curtsey, and a heavy sigh, as she subsided into a corner again.

Neal detected a great difference in Ada Merton. She had grown into a graceful young woman since he had seen her last, although, like himself, looking older than her years, despite her bright smile, and the life in her face. Possibly all earnest faces—faces looking beyond the present hour—are old-looking faces, and Ada's was therefore strictly according to rule. Ada was a studious girl, with no knowledge of the world, and too much of Crow Street, and of Crow Street chapel-folk, for sixteen years of age. But her inner life, her real nature, had not become distorted by seclusion and latter-day asceticism, or the brightness of that face belied her. It was a contented face enough, with an expression that won you towards it, though you knew not the reason, and thought, mayhap, all the while, how plain and swarthy it was!

There seemed little but introductions going on at No. 14. Neal Galbraith had had to intro-

duce his wife and father, in the first instance, to Mr. Pike; and then Ada entering the room the instant afterwards, Mr. Pike went through the ceremony of introducing his niece to his guests, even to Neal, forgetting, or ignoring, the commission with which he had intrusted him once by telegraph.

"I have heard so much of Mr. Galbraith's young wife, that I must make a prize of her at once, and carry her away," said Addie, suiting the action to the word, and leading our heroine up-stairs. "I am glad that I have seen you. How pretty you are!"

This spoken when they were together—spoken very frankly, in no flattering manner, and with somewhat of that brusqueness natural to her, and which Neal had remarked when she was a year younger.

"You're very good to flatter me," said Carry, somewhat taken aback at the first start.

"I don't flatter any one," said Ada, "it's the truth, and I do not suppose that you are ashamed of it. I wish I could change my dark skin for a white one," she added laughingly, "and feel it was the truth to be told that I was pretty myself."

Carry had a vague idea that Miss Merton was

angling for a compliment in her turn—Carry, who had not mixed a great deal with truthful people before marriage.

"I'm sure that you—" she began, when Miss Merton stopped her at once.

"Oh! don't, please," she said, "don't say a word about me, but take your bonnet off, and come downstairs. There's another knock, and more company arriving. I hope this little *soirée* will not turn my quiet old uncle's head."

"Old uncle!—is that the truth too, Miss Merton?" said Carry, quickly.

"I beg pardon—no, that's a home-phrase, which is a little exaggerated. And yet he is my old uncle—old in his love and his care for me. You have heard your husband speak of Mr. Pike very often."

"Not very often."

Ada looked surprised for an instant.

"Why, Mr. Pike is always mentioning Mr. Galbraith—I thought that they were such very great friends."

Ada and Carry went downstairs, the former to welcome the additions to the party—a stout man and a stout lady of middle age, both beaming

with smiles and general affability, shaking hands heartily with the Galbraiths upon introduction, and laughing more heartily still after they had been introduced—laughing at nothing particular, which rendered the whole affair the more interesting. The stout gentleman was a Mr. Bury, and "an elder of our chapel," added Mr. Pike, in a lower tone, to Mr. Galbraith, senior, who replied at once, "Dear me, Mr. Elderberry—eh? great pleasure," and called the stout gentleman Mr. Elderberry for the remainder of the evening.

After the advent of Mr. and Mrs. Bury, came a Mrs. and Miss Plingarth, a juvenile mother in ringlets, with a daughter possessing no hair to speak of, and looking as old as the mother—both in white muslins, with blue sashes, and therefore the most "dressy" of the community. These were followed by a meek-looking old gentleman with grey hair and whiskers, who brought in a sheepish and sullen-looking son—son dropping into the first chair by the door, and declining to be introduced to anybody, evidently for private reasons or private grievances of his own. The meek man with white hair, after shaking hands with the rest of the party, was led to the Galbraiths and mentioned

as the Reverend Wilbraham Hedger, and Neal felt by the impressive tones of Mr. Pike's voice that this Mr. Hedger was the great man of Crow Street, the man by whom Mr. Pike held his tenure of faith.

Carry by this time was at Neal's side again, and not overawed by the company assembled in Mr. Pike's front parlour.

"What a funny lot of people, Neal!" she whispered.

Neal had been regarding the company in the light of a funny lot himself, but jumped a little at Carry's assertion.

"Yes, but I wouldn't say so just now though," said Neal.

The guests were all assembled, and Ada took the head of the tea-table, whilst the ladies and gentlemen drew their seats round, and looked towards Mr. Wilbraham Hedger, who, equal to the occasion, rose and delivered a long grace, not badly, not without earnestness, but certainly too long. Then Miss Merton poured forth the tea, and the tea-table prattle began to ripple forth in unison, Miss Plingarth rippling her hardest at David Pike, whose conquest she seemed bent

on, if lavish smiles and white muslin could effect it. But then Mrs. Plingarth, who was a widow, seemed to have leanings in that direction also, and watched Mr. Pike intently, darting in little inquiries from the other side of the table, and once almost singeing herself against the tea urn in her impulsiveness.

Carry sat on one side of Ada Merton, and Mr. Hedger, junior—who had manœuvred for the place—on the other, and it was evident to all eyes that Mr. Hedger, junior, had also "leanings" for the young hostess, and did not care who knew it, though he maintained his stolid aspect, and spoke to her in an ungallant way, with his mouth full and fugitive shrimps endeavouring to escape therefrom. Mr. Galbraith, senior, had Mrs. Bury on his right, and Neal was sandwiched between Mr. Bury and the melancholy lady, whose name was Grig, by way of hideous contrast, and who had an eccentric habit of cooling her tea with heavy sighs. The Reverend Mr. Hedger had been placed on the left of Neal's father, with an object, as it turned out afterwards; but Mrs. Bury had darted, with a charming naiveté, into a history of seven little Burys left at home on the top floor of

her house in the Kingsland Road, and Mr. Hedger, who had spent his life in submission, made no attempt to distract Mr. Galbraith's attention. Neal watched his father with an amused expression of countenance; he could see how utterly lost were Mr. Galbraith's attempts to follow the thread of Mrs. Bury's discourse, and yet how he strove to maintain an attentive deportment, by nodding his head at every full stop, and saying very rapidly, "Yes, yes, yes, just as you say, ma'am."

Mr. Pike, whom Miss Plingarth would have fixed in the same manner, struggled away to address the guests collectively, to hope that they were all doing well, and all paying attention to the good things which he had provided for them. His tea-party was evidently an undertaking; one could see his embarrassment or excitement, suppressed though it was; he seemed on the watch for Addie's cues to assist with the bread and butter, and pass round the cups; he adopted furtive methods of dabbing his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief; he had never had a party in his life before, and its responsibility was almost too much for him. In little things of life, a nervous man—in great things, which required more than common nerve—

we may find him more "up to the mark," ere he drops out of our readers' remembrance.

Pike was grateful when the small maid—he had a small maid attached to his household, now-a-days—had cleared away the tea-things; he should be enabled to escape from Miss Plingarth, to separate the guests more, and to pay more attention to Neal's wife and Neal's father, especially the latter, with whom he was anxious to have a few quiet minutes, Mr. Galbraith being a man after his own heart, in one thing at least.

Neal found himself addressed by Mr. Pike's niece, after tea; there was a vacant chair by his side, then, and she took it easily and gracefully. She was a girl endowed with a rare amount of self-possession, and therefore a foil in minor matters to her uncle.

"You are scientific, Mr. Galbraith?" she said.

"I might have been, had time allowed me, Miss Merton," he answered; "the force of events has drifted me away from my natural tastes."

"Uncle David has brought all his clever friends together this evening to meet your father—we are all scientific on one subject or another."

"Oh! that accounts——"

"For the oddities of the guests," said Addie, finishing his sentence; "well, I think it may a little."

"In what direction are Miss Grig's abilities turned?" asked Neal, thinking with a shudder of his recent proximity to that low-spirited female.

"Astronomy. And Mrs. and Miss Plingarth are very clever at photography."

"Indeed! And yourself?"

"Oh! I know a little of everything, and excel in nothing, much to Uncle David's dissatisfaction."

"And Uncle David?"

"Well, I'm afraid that he is something like his niece—only that he knows more, and excels sometimes. Dear uncle, he is full of clever theories, and is the first to appreciate a clever thought in others. I think that he ought to have been something better than a clerk," she added after a pause.

"An engineer, as my father was, to a certain extent?"

"No. I was not thinking of his cleverness, just at that moment. I would have seen him, if it had been ordered so, a minister of the gospel."

"A grand vocation," said Neal, a little startled at her enthusiasm.

"And he would have excelled therein, Mr. Galbraith—he is so generous and unselfish. You like him?"

"Very much—I am just beginning to understand him."

"Ah! it takes time."

She crossed to the table, to assist in arranging a variety of specimens of various subjects—a microscope, a stereoscope, &c.,—a scientific meeting was evidently setting in. Carry took her place, looking a little grave.

"How do you like these people, Neal?" she asked.

"Well-meaning people, I daresay—I cannot give a verdict on them yet awhile."

"I don't like any of them," she said, a little petulantly; "they're all so pious! I have never had anything to do with chapel people before—what am I to talk about, without outraging their feelings?"

"Why, have you outraged any one's feelings already, Carry?" asked Neal, with a laugh; "that's beginning early."

"I mentioned theatres to Mrs. Bury, just now, and I have shocked her very much!"

"Never mind—Mrs. Bury will recover in time, and I daresay we shall never see that good lady again. You and I are not chapel people—nor church people either, for the matter of that. These good folk look at life very seriously, and are all the better for it; when we are their age, we shall be serious, too."

"I shall be glad to get away from them. I cannot drop into strangers's ways so readily as you, Neal. Any one would think that you had known Miss Merton all your life."

"Hollo!

Neal looked steadfastly at Carry. Here was a new phase of character developing itself, of which he had known little or nothing. Surely she had not objected to his conversation with Miss Merton —she was not inclined in the least to be jealous, he hoped! And yet had she not been jealous before that time—jealous of that love for his father, which she had thought greater than that love for herself?

"What do you mean by 'Hollo?'" asked Carry, still petulantly.

"I was surprised by your interest in my little conversation with Miss Merton—that's all."

"Oh! I took no interest in it—it was nothing to do with me, I suppose?" she said yawning. "Heigho! I wish I were back in Fife Street!"

"We'll start early, Carry."

"There's a good Neal!"

And contented with this promise, she went to look at the microscope, which Mr. Pike had been for the last ten minutes arranging for her. Mr. Galbraith, senior, warmed into new life by the production of scientific apparatus, skipped to the table also.

"This is like the old times!" he cried, "before all my instruments were sold off. The models went for a mere song, Mr. Pike, and many of them were the work of years."

"You must replace them some day," said Mr. Pike, cheerily.

"When we can afford it—not just yet."

"When I was a younger man—a mere boy, in fact—I remember hearing of Galbraith the Inventor. I did not think then that his son would ever become a friend of mine."

"We pick up all kinds of friends when we are unfortunate," said Mr. Galbraith.

"Ye-es," said Mr. Pike, regarding the old gentleman dubiously.

But Mr. Galbraith had intended no offence, and was carelessly turning over the leaves of an old *Mechanics' Magazine.*

"We cannot help misfortunes, either," said Mr. Galbraith; "we are not always the agents to our own ruin. There was my patent—you remember it?"

"Well. I have studied it all my life—the trials concerning it, and everything."

"Indeed! *Why?*"

"Oh! for many reasons," said Mr. Pike, blushing; "it was altogether a strange story—I never saw clearly to the end of it."

"I was not treated justly."

"I don't think that you were."

Neal saw the father's animation, and hastened to intrude upon it.

"This is an old story, father," he said; "we need not dwell upon it to-night, I think."

"But that scoundrel Tressider, Neal, who—"

"Tressider belongs to the bygones," said Neal, with a meaning look at Mr. Pike. "What is he to do with you or me, or our host now?"

"Well, but about that patent," said Mr. Galbraith; "after all, it wasn't perfect, Mr. Pike. Only the day before yesterday I thought of a wonderful improvement, that would astonish the whole world; and I believe, upon my word of honour as a gentleman, that I shall work it out *in extenso*. Look here, I can trust you—Neal's friend—where's a bit of paper, I'll just give you an idea."

Neal shrugged his shoulders, and smiled at Mr. Pike; but Mr. Pike only stared at Neal in reply, as he produced some writing paper from his drawer.

Mr. Galbraith, in his true element, dropped into a chair by the table, pushed a stereoscope away with his elbow into the eyes of Miss Grig, who had appropriated that instrument, seized the pencil and paper, and looked up at his host.

"See here—this was the old idea. Now, it occured to me the day before yesterday that all this affair could be done away with, all this remedied, by a very ingenious process—the cold blast introduced in this way! Neal, don't you remember my alluding to it?"

"Alluding to it!—yes, but you had not finished

the rough sketch; and I always wait till I see the sketch before I express an opinion."

"Well, I don't exactly remember the details—I'll work them out presently, but this was the general idea; and I—I fancied that it was rather more than usually clear, for once."

Mr. Galbraith was rather more than usually clear too—this was a night of inspiration; he had heard himself called Galbraith the Inventor, again, a title of which he was once proud in his heart. He had found a man well versed in his life and actions; and, in his spasmodic confidence, he was less fearful of betraying his ideas. He sketched rapidly, and with a hand that seemed to gather force as he proceeded. With a few rough decisive lines he had laid bare his last plan—his addendum to the old master-stroke, which had hurled him from his high estate.

Neal watched listlessly; all this was nothing new to him, and pained him not a little, as evidence of his father's weakness, not strength; but Mr. Pike looked over Mr. Galbraith's shoulder, and held his breath with suspense and admiration. They were three men with a knowledge of the subject—two with a fugitive knowledge, and one

with it all at his fingers ends; all three understood, the two watchers at last seeing things more clearly, and Neal even bestirring himself.

"There—that's my plan—I can work that out, I think."

"If you only can—if you'll only try!" said Mr. Pike, with excitement. "I think I see it all myself."

"Oh! do you?" said Mr. Galbraith, crumpling the sketch in his hands, and thrusting it into his pocket. "Perhaps you have seen too much."

"Neal," said Mr. Pike, entreatingly, "don't let your father lose that paper—there may be a fortune in it. I—I think that he's right."

"It will not bear the light of day on it, I am afraid," said Neal; "that is the fault of my father's plans—they are catching, but not sound. Not *quite* sound," he added, noting his father's crest-fallen look.

"Perhaps all three of us might——" suggested Mr. Pike.

"I don't like partnership," said Mr. Galbraith. "I'll work it myself, and show you that I can turn out a sound idea, weak as I have become—see if I don't, Neal!"

Mr. Pike was drawn away at this juncture to

describe microscopic action to Miss Plingarth, a lady intensely interested in the subject, who leaned fondly against David, whilst he was arranging his specimens, and rested her hands lightly on his shoulder, and was so anxious to follow David's inspection of a fly's wing, that she brought her head with a smarter concussion than was bargained for against that of the operator's.

Meanwhile affairs dragged a little. Carry had not become used to "good people;" one she had unintentionally shocked, and when Ada drew her into a corner, and began to talk "seriously," to inquire about chapels on the other side of the water—what free schools, refuges, and charities were in existence there—whether Carry knew the Reverend Reginald Rolls, of Panford Street, and what she thought of him, the young wife felt herself borne completely out of her element.

Carry was at a loss for a time; she could not understand the earnestness, even the enthusiasm, of Miss Merton; she had not been brought up to regard things seriously; her father and mother had never entered a place of worship in her life's experience; they had been strict with her, and brought her up strictly, but there had been no

religion in the midst of a harshness that was utterly worldly. Carry knew more about plays and players, than chapels and chapel-goers; she did not give credit for any one her own age being absorbed in what went on at quiet meeting-houses, in dirty back streets. She resented the topic at last, having been seized with the suspicion of Mr. Pike's niece desiring to show a superiority of goodness over her, and those like unto her. She professed a total ignorance of all dissenting movements; she was "fond" of theatres, she acknowledged, and too much absorbed in her own affairs to take any interest in missions yet awhile.

"I think it must be very up-hill work to be always good," she said, ironically.

"Oh! but I'm never good. I only try to do a little good sometimes."

"You can't tell whether your efforts are likely to be rewarded," said Carry; "people are very ungrateful."

"I don't mind what people think of my efforts," replied Ada, with her brusqueness a little more developed.

Carry did not like the tone, and, moreover, she was in an aggravating mood, for she had seen no-

thing to admire in any of the company. She was inclined to be brusque also.

"We must all mind what is said or thought of us, or affect to be above ordinary mortals, I think."

"Well, I don't affect to be the latter, for there are some ordinary mortals I strive vainly to imitate."

"What good creatures they must be, though!"

"I think that they are—they are of a different opinion. Now, there's Mr. Hedger——"

"What! that little punchy man?"

Addie's face darkened at this. She was a sharp girl—too sharp, she feared, when setting herself in evidence against herself!—and she detected the vein of acrimony running throughout Carry Galbraith's discourse. She was ready with her answer, but she checked it; Mrs. Galbraith was her uncle's guest, and she would not be severe upon her, if she could help it. But to call Mr. Hedger, the minister, the pastor of the flock, a little punchy man, that was too bad!

"Yes—one of the best of men that ever walked uprightly—a man above invective, winning everyone's love!"

"Is he a widower?"

"No," said Addie; "but supposing he were?"

Addie was arming for the battle now, in spite of herself; there were limits to courtesy, and no young lady, high or low church, can bear reflections adverse to the dignity of her pet priest. But at this juncture Mr. Pike appeared, and bore her off to the table, to pay all the attention that he considered due to the greatest stranger, as well as to the wife of a young man in whose progress he was interested.

The party broke up immediately after supper, as, though nothing more to eat being likely to appear, it behoved every thoughtful personage to get away as soon as possible. The good people broke up—Neal, his wife and father, were whirled Fife Street way in a cab; the rest of the guests walked home, a few streets' length, in more humble fashion. Mr. Pike was left with his niece at last —he rubbed one hand over the other, and thought that it had been a very successful evening. What did Addie think?"

She was afraid that it had been dull—that Mr. and Mrs. Galbraith had not enjoyed themselves very much.

"Oh! they were a little strange—it was new to them—I did not observe any signs of dulness," said

Mr. Pike; "what do you think of Neal's choice?"

"She is a strange young woman," replied Addie; "I don't admire her very much."

"My dear, that's—that's scarcely fair."

"I shall like her better when I understand her, perhaps."

So Carry was hard to understand in this new quarter. Meanwhile, what was Carry's verdict on Ada Merton?

"What do you think of Mr. Pike's niece, Carry?" asked Neal.

"Oh! I don't like her *at all!*"

Mr. Pike's conversazione was evidently not a brilliant success.

CHAPTER V.

SLIGHTLY STORMY.

MR. GALBRAITH, senior, was quite nervous and excitable the next morning. So nervous, that Neal, ever exercising a filial supervision, inquired, with affected carelessness, how yesternight's dissipation had agreed with his sire.

"Well—very well," he said, rubbing his hands briskly together; "that Pike's a sensible fellow, Neal."

"Yes, I think that he's clever."

"A capital memory, too—he remembered all about me, and what the world used to call me in the old days. And that last idea of mine—I—I hope I didn't let him into the secret too much!"

"He would not take advantage of your generosity."

"Oh! I don't know that," said Mr. Galbraith, doubtfully; "we can't tell whom to trust now-a-

days. Shall you be long clearing away the breakfast things, Caroline?"

"Neal has not begun breakfast yet, sir," reminded Carry.

"Oh! I beg pardon—I did not notice."

"You must not be too anxious about these plans, sir," said Neal.

"No, my boy; but that last idea might be considered more. It is not quite straight—it's only the ghost of an idea at present."

"Leave it in spirit-land till next week, and take a walk with Carry this morning, sir," suggested his son.

"No, thank you. Not this morning. I have made up my mind for hard work."

"Very well—but it *is* a beautiful morning."

Mr. Galbraith would not take the hint, and Neal did not go to business without an injunction to Carry to be watchful of his father, and see that intense application exercised no injurious effect.

At business, Neal found David Pike at his desk, somewhat red-eyed and pale, as though his efforts to amuse last night's community had been a trifle too much for him.

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, Neal. How's your father this morning?"

"Pretty well, sir, thank you."

"Neal, I have been working at his plan all night—thinking over it, wrestling with it," he said, eagerly, "and there really is something in it that might make all our fortunes."

"In all his schemes there is a little something that is sensible," said Neal.

"But he has the right idea—I once had an idea like it in some respects, and gave it up as a failure; but this is almost clear. I see it now."

"To the end—to success?"

"Not quite so far as that; but I sat up all night, trying to remember your father's plan, and working it out, in my own way, to the same end. Neal," said Mr. Pike, with excitement, "you understand these things—you and I must work together at this, at my house, quietly, and then call in your father, and compare notes with him. We'll make a model first."

"And our fortunes afterwards—very well, sir!"

"And don't let him lose that paper."

Business was not flourishing that day in Shad Thames, and, the books finished, and accounts of

the day satisfactorily wound np, Mr. Pike returned to the old theme. Mr. Pike was evidently engrossed by the subject—Neal remained phlegmatic to the last; he was the burnt child, who held aloof from the fire of discovery. A great discovery had been the ruin of him and his. What was to be anticipated from an improvement on that old idea? The chances were against success—and once successful, the robbers of trade, and their name was legion, would only filch the idea, and defy the inventors.

Neal did not return home with Mr. Pike that evening—on the following day he promised to make a second call at Crow Street. He returned home, to find his father fretting over his last plan, which had all gone wrong during the day.

"There's nothing much in it after all, Neal," he said, ruefully. "It's all a mistake, from beginning to end."

"Then I would not trouble my head with mistakes," said Neal; "you'll think of something better before the year's out."

"I fear not—I'm not so sanguine as I used to be."

"We'll postpone this *sine die*, at all events."

"Very well," with a little sigh; "it's no good—it only worries me when things will not come right. I have put away all the papers about it in that portfolio you used to hide from me, you rogue!"

"Just to keep them from perplexing you by their obtrusiveness."

"Yes—I suppose so. You have been a good son to me, Neal."

The old gentleman dozed off after tea, and Neal, for the first time almost in his experience, took up the portfolio recently alluded to. Mr. Pike had awakened a little fresh interest in his father's schemes, and he would just look at the last plan, if only to smile at its impracticability.

Carry, busy at needle-work, and waiting to be asked to join Neal in a walk before supper, or for Neal's proposition to continue the novel he had been reading aloud to her, looked with surprise at her husband's actions.

"Oh! those tiresome, hateful papers again, Neal!"

"Just a moment, Carry."

"Shall I put my bonnet on? Are we going out to-night?"

"Yes, I think so. I shall not be long over these."

Carry went up-stairs to equip herself for a stroll—these strolls after tea with Neal were ever memorable to her, for they were full of the happiness of a past life, when she looked back upon them—and Neal rummaged the portfolio for his father's last conception, and discovered it in due course, side by side with the paper which had been shown last night to Mr. Pike.

There were other papers relating to the same subject; here and there were the first ideas, struck off, and left in mid-thought; occasionally a page or two of closely-written MS. seemed to refer to the same subject; and Neal gathered them together, and pored over them, and saw, amidst the crudities of the first birth, the glimmering of genius, which misfortune had not wholly extinguished.

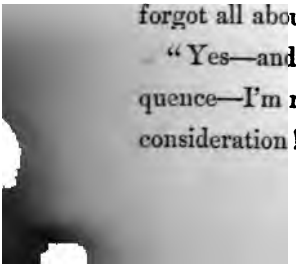
Neal's was an appreciative mind, and could sift the real from the false; he was even clever himself, and had more than once fought hard against the temptation to be carried along the road on which his father had dropped. In his youth he had been an inventor, until his father's misfortune had rendered him severely practical; he had thought of earning his own living after that, not of making a discovery. But that night a discovery seemed

almost ready to his hand; his father's mind had strengthened, and the proof thereof was before him, in the first faint elucidation of a new principle in science. The principle was not fairly developed —the ideas were out of gear; but the elements of success were there; and time and patience bestowed upon them by men with clearer, cooler heads, might work wonders, as Pike—no sanguine man—had almost prophesied.

Neal pored over the papers, read every line of the pencil MS., studied the diagrams, finally took his head between his hands, and went off into that misty world which his father had created around him.

When he woke therefrom his father was sleeping soundly still, the clock was striking ten, and Carry, grim and passive, was sitting in a corner by the door, with her bonnet on, as she had sat for three hours, too proud to make a sign.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, Carry!" cried Neal, waking up suddenly from his father's world, "I forgot all about going out!"



"Yes—and all about me! It's of no consequence—I'm nobody—I never was anybody worth consideration!"

"I'm very sorry," repeated Neal, "but Mr. Pike was speaking of these plans this afternoon, and I thought that they might be worth looking at."

"Why did you not say so, and not ask me to put my bonnet on?"

"I did not intend to waste all this time over them."

"You may well call it wasting time."

"And I'll not do so any more, Carry—there, will you forgive me?"

"I don't know that I shall. I don't like to sit here, looking foolish, and no one speaking to me, or thinking about me."

"Why did you not speak to me, Carry?"

"I would have died first!" exclaimed Carry, still indignant at the affront that had been put upon her.

"Well, I can do no more than apologize," said Neal, frowning a little at Carry's persistence; "and here goes the portfolio out of my sight."

"I'll burn it to-morrow—the hateful thing!"

"No—don't do that."

Neal became suddenly very stern in demeanour; and Carry turned pale, and clutched at the arms of the chair, in which she was sitting.

But she did not give way—her nature was a rebellious one; it was her sad inheritance, poor Carry!

"It has made words more than once between you and me—between me and him. I'll burn it!"

"I say you must not—shall not!"

"We will see."

"Eh!—what's that?—burn the portfolio!" cried Mr. Galbraith, senior, waking up; "who's thinking of such a thing as that?"

"I am, Mr. Galbraith," said Carry.

"Take out the cold-blast scheme, Neal—there's a good fellow! She'll do it, if she says so and looks like that. Take out the papers, my lad."

"I put them all in my pocket-book some time since. I am going to study them myself."

"Ah! see what you can make of them. A new mind might light upon the right idea—mine is worn out, and cannot bear the strain. Still I—I don't think it was quite right to talk of burning the papers; and I would be ashamed to threaten such a thing."

"I would be ashamed, Mr. Galbraith, to set the wife against the husband with your inuendoes," cried Carry.

"Who, I!" cried the old gentleman in return. "God bless me!—I would not do it for the world."

"You have done it to-night."

"Hush! hush!" said Neal. "Carry, you don't know what you are saying. I have vexed you, and you vent your indignation on this weak old man. I am sorry for that."

Carry's lip quivered, for Neal's voice had softened, and there was regret in its tones. Strike the right key, and the heart was touched of this distraught girl, but woe to him who sounded for ever the wrong note.

"You have worried and teased me, Neal," she said.

"Not intentionally," was the answer; "you were hard upon my sins of omission, Carry, and would not forgive me."

"You never asked to be for—for—forgiven!" and then Carry gave way—like a child as she was still—and rushed from the room sobbing violently. Neal followed to make his peace with her—he was her husband, who loved her very dearly, and to tell her so was to bring the smiles and sunshine back to her face.

"I can't bear that you should think of any one

—or any thing—before me, Neal. If you don't give me the first place in your heart, I shall think that you are tiring of me. And I *have* only you now!"

This was a little fugitive storm. Presently came another, despite the promises of both man and wife to hold ever aloof from the tempest.

Neal went to Crow Street the next evening, and devoted himself to the new project; if there were anything in it, let him soberly and steadily search with Mr. Pike, losing or finding the prize as quickly as possible. Neal went at the matter in a business way; he was cool, collected, and far from sanguine; should it realize all expectations, it might be but a brighter side to ruin—the inventor's fate was ever before him, a living evidence to the dangers of discovery.

But Neal had not bargained for the excitement of the chase, for the hopes to be born in the progress, for the faith in the *ignis fatuis* which led him on through the marshes. Two more sober-minded men than Pike and Neal could not have sat down to work out a theory; they were practical and careful, but even they became over-sanguine as they verged on the truth.

They began to construct a small model; by that time they had deviated considerably from the first plans of Mr. Galbraith, senior; the chances seemed evidently in their favour; there were several hitches in the way still, but they both had patience, and Mr. Pike, and even our hero, sank a little money—neither could afford much—in the scheme by degrees, and buoyed up their hopes with new ventures.

"When we are a little more advanced," Pike would say, "we will call your father in again; for the present, we will work as quietly as we can together, keeping this as much a secret as possible."

Neal had lost some of his coolness during these studies; he was in full chase of the grand idea, and had become more thoughtful, looking forward to to the hopes a-head of him. In the good time, he should rise from Fife Street, taking Carry and his father with him; but he refrained from speaking of that good time, lest natures more sanguine than his own should build too much upon it, and feel perhaps in the bad time the disappointment more keenly. Neal became abstracted, even taciturn. The discovery came between him and

his wife, as discoveries always will, despite the efforts of the genius to keep them down.

He spoke now and then of his plans to Carry, who did not understand them, and who took but little interest in them, for the reason that he veiled his own interest on principle, and spoke indifferently.

Carry, a girl ready to jump at conclusions, began to think that Neal's plan was but an excuse to keep away from home more frequently, to leave her for society more congenial in Crow Street. In her heart she was jealous of Ada Merton, as young wives, tenacious of trifles, and with but one hope to cling to, will be jealous if their moral training have been even more closely attended to than Carry's.

Carry did not believe in grand discoveries, and thought that Neal did not believe in them either, or he would not so frequently shun all allusion to them. She forgot that it had been her husband's rule in Mr. Galbraith's presence before she had known him; she forgot even that faith in Neal which had led her to trust him implicitly with her future. Far from a heroine, the reader perceives —only a common-place woman, irritable, jealous,

inconsiderate, taking in material for her own unhappiness, and storing it up day by day.

Unconsciously she helped to deceive Neal, by doing her best to present a cheerful appearance, and telling him not of her troubles—Neal should not say that she was discontented, or grieving. He should always find her ready to meet him with a smile, she thought; and if the plans took him away to Mr. Pike's, and left her to amuse her variable old father-in-law, she would bear with his absence as long as she was able. But, heigho! she was not so happy as she thought she should have been —she was sure that Neal did not love her so well as he used—that he was becoming tired of her by degrees!

She would bear all this quietly now—it was part of her lot, and she would not complain any more. The happiness to which she had looked forward as Neal's wife, was fading away; but she could sit on the rock, lonely and desolate, like Ariadne. Then Carry gave up watching and waiting patiently for explanation; and one night, full of jealous curiosity, the wife of eighteen years made her appearance in Crow Street, and surprised the students there.

"Carry," said Neal, bewildered at her advent; "has anything happened to father?—what is it?"

Carry had looked round, and felt relieved that Ada was absent, and had left the two men poring over their model and papers. Mr. Pike had just returned from his little work-shop at the back, and was black and grimy, after furnace-studies.

"Nothing has happened," Carry replied; "only —only I was tired of being at home, and thought that I would come for you."

"You are very kind," said Neal, quietly; "I shall not keep you long. I have only five minutes more work here."

"I am sorry that Ada has gone to chapel this evening," added Mr. Pike; "she would have been very pleased to see you, I'm sure."

"It's of no consequence."

Carry felt that she had made a false step in coming thither, and that angered her rather than subdued her. Retracing with humility the wrong road is always a hard task—had been to Carry ever trebly difficult. Kind words and gentle hands had not sustained her by the way, and she had gone forwards, after a little struggle with

her better nature. She did not like Neal's tone of voice, and was inclined to resent it. Mr. Pike made matters worse.

"Ada's not often out so late as this—only now and then. She's clever enough at mechanics to help us—eh, Neal?"

"Now and then."

"When we are making our fortunes over this, Neal," said Mr. Pike, "we must allow her a per centage on the profits."

So Miss Merton interfered at times, and was occasionally their companion, thought Carry! Miss Merton was clever, and more suitable for Neal's society than she was—Neal did not mind leaving his wife, and spending his evenings in Crow Street. And they had been married such a little while, too—what would it be in a year or two's time, she wondered, if she did not show a proper spirit now? Oh! this proper spirit!—how many of us have been led astray by it in our time!

Ada Merton came home almost immediately, and welcomed Carry, who received her courteously, but coldly.

"It is reversing the social order of things, Miss

Merton, for the wife to fetch her husband home from *his* friends; but he keeps such late hours now," said Carry.

"I am ready," said Neal, rising.

Mr. Pike was embarrassed, and Ada looked from husband to wife with an intentness which vexed the latter still more.

"I have often pressed Mr. Galbraith to bring his wife with him," Ada said to Carry; "he forgets that he robs me of my uncle's attentions, and leaves me quite alone here."

"We are both neglected women, it seems," said Carry, a little scornfully.

"I am ready," Neal said again; and then, after hasty adieux, husband and wife went homewards together.

In the dark streets Neal walked stolidly by his wife's side for awhile, her hand lightly resting on his arm. Neal broke silence at last.

"May I ask the reason, Carry, for this successful attempt at my humiliation?"

Carry did not answer until he had repeated his question once more.

"I do not see how I have humiliated you by *my* presence."

"No matter—what brought you to Mr. Pike's?"

"I was tired of home. I wished to see that you—you——"

"Were employing my time honestly, and not in bad faith to you," concluded Neal. "Well, are you satisfied?"

"I don't know," was the sharp answer.

"You found me deep in the study of that which may benefit both you and me. What did you expect to find?"

"Nothing."

"You must have faith in me, Carry—faith in all I do and say. I am above suspicion," Neal added, sternly.

Sternness, we have more than once hinted, was the worst weapon with which to attack Carry—she had resisted sternness all her life, fought her fiercest battles against it, growing more obdurate in the contest.

"I am above threats, sir," was her quick answer; "you must not attempt to frighten me. You have not been acting rightly by me lately, and I shall not sit still and sink into the slave."

"Have I treated you badly, then?"

"You are beginning to neglect me."

"For awhile—for a something that may greatly enrich us."

"Or ruin us."

"Ah! or ruin us! You are thinking of my father, and perhaps I have done wrong, after all, in following out his chimeras; but that is not to the purpose now. I have begun, and shall go through with it—and the least thing in the world to stop me is the petty jealousy of one who should trust in me most of all!"

"Petty jealousy! Who says that I am jealous?"

"We will not discuss that question."

"Does Pike's fine clever niece think so? If she——"

"She thinks nothing about you or me—it is not likely. Don't drag her name into the discussion."

"Oh! you are her champion, of course!"

"And you are her unreasonable assailant, as you are the assailant of my self-respect and your own. You come to Pike's house with the airs of a termagant fetching a sottish husband home from the beer-shop. I'll not have that occur again!"

Neal had become stern and inflexible—it was the true nature of Neal rising to the surface. He

was no more a hero than Carry was a heroine—and it is not the virtues of this couple that constitute our story-book.

"You will not!" cried Carry.

"After my own fashion, I intend to have my own way," said Neal, very firmly. "It will not diminish my love for you in any one respect, but it will not seek to win your smiles by my own abasement. I cannot lower myself—I am too hard a man."

"Why did you not tell me this before I married you?"

"I did not see this scene!—I could not have believed in my wife, so soon after marriage, turning against me in her thoughts!"

"It is you that have turned against me," said Carry, with her lip quivering. "You are tired of me—I am sure of it!"

"I am tired of this querulousness—it aggravates me," said Neal, more fiercely still.

"Then why speak to me?"

Neal did not respond. He was aggrieved, and he drifted into silence after Carry's last angry interrogative. His wife had lowered herself and him, and he was pained to think that she was not

less a child. He must take the upper hand, and prove to her that it was not her duty to idly suspect him; without that, he could see many troubles impending over them both in the future. He was a man who reasoned very deeply for his age, but his age had not seen one-and-twenty summers, and he had had no experience of a life like his own. Moerover, he had forgotten—if he ever truly knew—the key-note to Carry's better nature. He was inclined to resent the affront to his dignity even at the cost of a reconciliation that might have easily been made. He felt that he had been in the right, and that it was not his place to explain away a doubt, utter an apology, or attempt to soothe the feelings of one who had so readily mistrusted him.

Carry was a tender-hearted girl, but she was wild and wayward, and succumbing to her would but end in trouble for both of them. He must sacrifice his own yearnings for peace, for the sake of the lesson that it would be to his wife. It was her place to ask forgiveness, not his to rush with open arms to fold her to his heart. So Neal Galbraith, with the best motives in the world, made his first mistake.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED, HAD SHE WAITED?

NEAL waited for the *amende honorable*, but it never came; Carry waited for kinder words, less evidence of marital dignity, but she waited, like her husband, in vain.

That visit to Crow Street became a thing of the past, that left a scar in its track. It became eventually too far-away a reminiscence to talk about or wrangle over; but there never had ensued a satisfactory explanation, and there had resulted a "difference," which time did not seem likely to set right. For it was a difference unexplainable after a while; Neal was altered to a certain extent, and yet there was no opportunity of Carry demurring to the change. The subject of the last altercation had been quietly dropped by

both. Neal was kind, but grave; affectionate, perhaps, but not loving; stern in his business thoughts, which would absorb him more and more, thought Carry—take him still more away from home, despite that effort to stand her ground, which has been recorded in our preceding chapter. Carry felt that her effort had been wrongly directed, and would have confessed as much with a little pressing; but Neal held aloof from the subject, till it grew too late to rake over the ashes of an ugly retrospect.

When summer had come, Neal had grown more absorbed in his new scheme, but he seldom spoke of that scheme to Carry now; and the young wife, in morbid moments, attributed his grave looks to regret at his rash marriage, to the cares of housekeeping, to anything but the right cause. Neal, despite his best efforts to remain his matter-of-fact self, had been borne along by the hopes of discovery; he had sunk that cleverness which had been his inheritance, and fancied himself content with pursuing a common-place career, until the temptation, struck out by his sire, had confronted him. Then he had proceeded calmly and philosophically to work, until progress had lured him on,

and the chances were on the side of success—thanks to that more clever brain of his father, by whose ideas Pike and he were endeavouring to profit.

Carry never asked a question concerning her husband's progress. Neal was not absent from home more than twice a week, but he was fond of working out abstruse calculations on paper, when he was at home; and he had altered more than he was aware of himself, if less so than Carry's imagination conjectured. It was a dull home enough for Carry; Neal felt that in time good fortune might brighten it, but Carry knew nothing of his hopes. There were the father and son, both working out their separate ideas now, as though Neal had caught his father's complaint; and Carry, if she desired company, had to seek the front parlour of Aunt Higgs.

To do Carry justice, she never complained. She kept her troubles to herself; she was making up her mind to bear all the ills that married life —unsympathetic married life—is heir to. If Neal were altering, she would complain only to him—and never to him without due cause. She should have cause enough, she feared, as the shadows deepened on her way. It was her mis-

fortune to be unlucky all her life—if she had never been born, how much better it would have been for all parties!

One evening, in the summer-time, Neal suddenly leaped from the table and seized his father's arm.

"Come for a walk with me. You must come with me to Mr. Pike's house. Mr. Pike and I want your opinion upon something."

"But, my dear boy, where's the occasion for hurry?"

"We're in a mess, Pike and I. We have been working at the cold-blast scheme improvements, and have wandered from your idea into incomprehensibility. Come and set us right."

"I don't remember anything particular about cold-blast improvements. How long was it ago, Neal?"

Neal said that he would explain as they went along together; and father and son departed, the son asking Carry not to sit up for them, as they were likely to be late.

Carry looked after him wistfully, and Neal—the old Neal—came back and kissed her, saying—

"We shall be rid of all these fogs about us presently, I hope, Carry. These are dull times, just for awhile."

"We can't have it all sunshine, Neal. I never married you in the hope of that!"

Neal did not like the tone of voice which responded to his assurance.

"No—I suppose not," he said, and went out hastily.

Carry was in a despondent mood that evening, and disposed to take a gloomy view of things. Neal's new excitability was not pleasant to her—he was becoming cross, as well as morbid, now. Was it her turn to repent quietly at leisure, after so hasty a marriage as hers? Was life in Fife Street so great a contrast to life in Shepherd Street, after all?

Carry was sitting at the table, nursing her chin with her hand, and dwelling on all this, when her name was croaked behind her. Carry looked up hastily, and cried "Mother!" Yes, the mother had stolen once more upon the scene—even such mothers as Mrs. Webber cannot keep long from the daughter!

She was a horrid old woman, though, and

hastened to explain her presence there, after Carry had flown to her and kissed her.

"There, don't think I've come on purpose to see you," she said, huskily; "or that it's any pleasure to come after a gal that flew in the face of all duty, like her brother Joe did. I ain't come for anythink of that sort."

"You are well, mother?"

"As well as can be expected at my time of life."

"And father?"

"Oh! he's well enough—he's always well," she answered; "you don't expect ever to see him again, I reckon?"

"No."

"He's as unforgiving a bit of brick as was ever lumped together; and you might as well talk to a nouse as him. I said so only yesterday—for he can't help me speaking *my* mind."

"No," agreed Carry, absently.

Mrs. Webber, without any good effect that was ostensible, had been speaking her mind all her life.

"He don't know I've come here—he wouldn't dream of me coming after you. He's comfortabler without his children, than he ever was with them—

it's his natur. But he don't come over me with his 'this shall be,' or 'shan't be.' I've a right to see you if I like!"

"Well, I think you have, mother."

"Not that I do like much," was the ungracious addition here; "for you were a limb that wanted your own way in everythink, and, mercy on us, how obstinate you was! I've no business with you, after you threw me over, and let your brute of a father have only me to swear at. You might have took your share."

Mrs. Webber nodded her head at her ungrateful daughter. Carry could not restrain a smile at the selfish nature of this reproof; the mother's interest in her had already done her good, and the mother's querulous complaints assured her that she had not changed for the worse in marrying Neal Galbraith.

"Aunt Higgs says that you are happy enough—is that true?"

Carry was not inclined to trouble any one with her complaints. Yes, she was happy—that *was* true enough!

"It's more than you deserve, mind. Where's your husband gone this evening?"

"Out on business."

"That's a good excuse to be out on the loose," said the sardonic mother; "you must not believe all that a husband tells you. I should have liked to see him, and told him to say nothing to any one about my coming here!"

"He will say nothing."

"He might meet Webber, and blurt it out; and Webber, when his blood's up—and it's up all in a fiz-like—wouldn't much mind jumping on me. Oh! the many years I've put up with that brute, Carry!"

Carry was accustomed to this style of her mother's—the old times seemed coming nearer, she thought, with a little shudder.

"There came a letter for you a week ago, and Webber told me to burn it, as there was no Miss Webber now; but I didn't, just to spite him. I kep it back, and then I opened it and read it," she added coolly; "and then, after a time, I thought I'd bring it to you, and let you read it, and that's why I came here. Not on any account to see if you were well—although I'm not sorry to see you are, and to hear that you're happy, as *you* say."

Carry flinched at the emphasis her mother put on the pronoun.

"Who wrote the letter?"

"You'll never guess—you'll may be sorry it didn't come earlier, for women are strange critters. But you've been in a hurry, and must make the best of it. There's no turning back—I married in a hurry myself, and a precious fool I have always thought myself since! For there was nothing in your father—and I might have done much better in my time. I don't see very well how I could have done wus for myself—do you, Carry?"

"Father's rough at times—but you understand him better than all of us."

"I have been taught to know his little jokes," was her dry answer.

"And this letter?"

"Oh! here it is—perhaps you'd better keep it to yourself, or burn it. Husbands don't care about such letters as these turning up so quickly after marriage."

Mrs. Webber produced a letter from her pocket, and Carry, glancing at the superscription, changed colour just a little.

"From Mr. Tressider."

"Yes, a pretty game with the chaps you've been carrying on in your time, Miss."

"I cannot explain now—it's scarcely worth explanation. Long ago I did like him a little. You can see that by this letter."

"Yes, I can see that without spectacles."

"But that's all over—long ago that was all over. Has father seen this?"

"No, he thinks I burnt it."

"I will read it now."

"You might talk a bit to me, and tell me how you're getting on," grumbled Mrs. Webber; "you can read that—if it's worth reading—after I'm gone. I don't know why I brought it to you, except that I was curious to know who Tressider might be."

"He was my first love—a good-hearted, careless, reckless sort of man, with whom a girl like me could not venture to trust her happiness. He says that he is well, I hope?" said Carry, turning the letter over and over in her hands.

"You can see it all when I've gone away. I shan't stay long—Webber thinks I've come out for groceries. And so you're happy, Carry?"

"Yes—very."

Carry spoke out more boldly now; she was sure that she was happy, and without a wish to get back to Shepherd Street. And the mother was glad to receive that information, however stolidly she bore the intelligence; she had not been the best of mothers, but she was mother enough to miss her daughter, and to yearn for a sight of her again. She had been glad of an excuse to come to Fife Street.

She went away after awhile, and Carry spread the letter out on the table, and proceeded to read it.

It may save time in description if we let Mr. Walter Tressider's letter speak for itself.

"Star's Hotel, Liverpool, July 8th, 18—

"DEAREST CARRY,

"Will you be very much surprised at a letter from me—at the manner in which I have begun this letter—at my boldness in assuming that you are still 'dearest Carry' to me? I ignore the fact that we parted resolving not to think any more of each other, to forget that we were once dear to each other, to begin life afresh, each for himself and herself, sinking the bygones for ever. I don't like to think that we ever came to the re-

solution of forgetting a past wherein our hopes made us happy, and that I advised you, seemingly in cold blood, to think no more about me. I thought it was for the best, for I went away with a gloomy consciousness of remaining a scamp and a blackleg all my life. I set you free, believing that our engagement would but hamper your future. I professed to be glad of my freedom, in order that you might forget me more easily, acting for the first and last time like a hero. Well, the tide in my affairs has changed—I have met with good fortune—I am likely to be a successful man! Full of hope, I am coming back to London —I write in advance of my advent to beg you to forget our last meeting, to think that I love you more passionately than ever, to ask if you will let me look forward to making your whole future happy as my wife. Our tastes are similar, our chances of happiness are not vague ones—I am sanguine of a bright life for us both. If there be but little hope for me, do not answer this—if you forget with me that last bitter parting, write a line to me at Liverpool at once.

"Yours for ever affectionately,

"WALTER TRESSIDER."

Carry read this letter over twice, her cheek paling somewhat at its earnestness, at its sanguine nature, so characteristic of its writer when full of faith in his success. All had been over between them for some time; she could estimate his merits at their true value, and see the difference between him and her husband, but it was still a letter not to be coldly read or lightly set aside. This man was her first love—the hero of her girlish dreams; she had pictured many times life with him from the altar to the grave. It had been a secret passion on both sides, and hers had burned more fiercely, perhaps; when he bade her think no more of him, she thought that her heart was broken. It was all over now, but it was a leaf from the old story thrown once more in her way, and she could but pore over it with tear-dimmed eyes.

Then came the thought—the ever-busy devil is a good prompter to such thoughts as these—of what would have happened had she waited? Would she have answered this letter with all her heart, and been more happy as Tressider's wife than quiet, matter-of-fact Neal's? Tressider was romantic like herself, and Neal held aloof from the

poetry of life; Tressider was her first hero, her first love, whilst Neal she had fought hard to love —yes, she owned that!—out of pity for his great affection, out of pity, too, for the desolateness of her own life!

What would have happened had she waited? She could not shake the thought away—the room was empty of home-figures, and she peopled it with fantasies. The old prompter to whom we have just made allusion spoke up for her, and stirred her heart to its depths. She had been unhappy lately, and Neal had not lightened her way. She had been unsettled, and he had not sought to calm her.

Tressider would have had no business apart from hers, or considered her mind too weak to enter into its details. He would have been a famous man, a great actor, some one whom the populace would rush to see—and his triumphs would have been hers, and she would have been doubly happy in sharing them. She had always loved the stage and stage players—the unreal element before the foot-lights where real life is seldom pictured, and a caricature of it gains the greatest applause—she would have been happy with *him*, all her life she had

been too impulsive, and had marred with every step her better prospects.

Carry thought thus for a while—in the first whirl of her excitement engendered by that letter's perusal—then, like a brave woman with a heart well poised, she shook off the blight from her mind.

She thought of Neal's patience, perseverance, faith—the strength of mind which had pushed on to the goal, and the courage which had taken her for better for worse, knowing so little of her antecedents, and trusting in her from the first. She saw Tressider's vacillation, and Neal's straightforwardness, the flimsy tinsel adornments of the one, and the solid merits of the other—the weakness that gave way in distress, and the dogged courage that resisted the shock. One had been her first lover, but the other was her husband, whom she had not tried very hard to make happy lately.

"I wonder why I ever liked Tressider at all," thought Carry, in the first flush of the reaction; "he was always a child, with no will of his own. He will be unfortunate, and then sink down again, poor fellow! When Neal comes home, I must show him the letter—what will he think of it?"

But Neal and his father were long in coming home—longer than ordinary. Carry grew vexed with their stay, with their inconsiderateness in leaving her so long alone. Then rose the old grievance before her—Neal never studied the time when he was at Crow Street; he was never anxious to come home as he used to be; the figure of his wife, sitting up for him, red-eyed and lonely, never flitted before him to mar his rejoicing. It was all very well to talk of the model, and to hint at the good fortune in store for them in the days of success, but the good fortune never came, and the model and the experiments connected therewith were always motives for absence. And then that Ada Merton, who knew so much more than she did, and was so much more good and tractable, thought Carry, with a hand that clenched itself upon the table.

Mrs. Higgs came upstairs to sit with her—to congratulate her on the evidence of her mother's affection; but Carry was too restless to appreciate the value of her aunt's company, and she was glad when Mrs. Higgs said good night to her, and advised her not to sit up any longer.

Carry resisted all advice, and sat up till father

and son came home—at a very late hour, the son gloomy and thoughtful, the father loquacious in the extreme. A slight acknowledgment of her existence, and then the old tiresome talk of the cold-blast.

"I'll have no more to do with it," said Neal; "I can see this idea—this chimera—beggaring Pike and me, distracting both of us from sober application to business. You have shown our mistake out clearly enough, and I am tired of all uphill work."

"I think it's worth sticking to, at your leisure, Neal. You have wandered too far from the facts, and will have to return to them. You and I will go over all the old drawings to-morrow—Pike and you will never do without the old inventor helping you, after all."

"I was a fool to be led away from the path I had marked out for myself. I see that now."

Father and son went on talking thus together, and Carry resented her isolation.

"I think that you might have dismissed that tiresome subject with the night you have wasted over it, Neal," said she at last.

Neal looked towards her.

"Perhaps you are right enough. I am not good company when the cold-blast fit is on me, Carry."

"I have something to tell you."

"Oh! nothing new to-night, girl," said Neal, wearily; "tell me to-morrow. I am tired—unhappy—sorry for the time mis-spent chasing a fallacy."

"Very well—I will tell you to-morrow."

"It is nothing important?"

"Nothing," said Carry, trying to subdue all evidence of vexation.

"That's all right."

Neal dropped to sleep in his chair the instant afterwards, and the father looked at him sorrowfully—and with a strange intelligence for him.

"Poor Neal! He's right—he should not have begun to think of this—it's my old life beginning again, step by step."

"I hope not," whispered Carry.

"He has a stronger head than I ever had—he will fight through it, and do the family name credit, perhaps. God bless the boy! he's cleverer than that Pike! He's waking up to the right idea, and if he be patient, he'll drop on it yet. But if he

had not begun, it would have been so much the better for him!"

"Yes—I see that."

"It's a horrid thing to have one thought haunting you. It kills all else."

"It kills all happiness at home," said Carry, moodily.

"That is to be expected, my dear. Genius never finds happiness. Why, *I* didn't!"

Carry sat and watched her boy-husband some time before she awoke him, and reminded him of the lateness of the hour. And again, whilst she watched, the thought came to her from her evil counsellor—

"What would have happened had she waited?"

CHAPTER VII.

WALTER TRESSIDER CALLS AT CROW STREET.

MR. PIKE had given way to the love of invention equally as much as Neal Galbraith. His was a mind more evenly balanced, and his was a temper that took the obstacles in the way with greater composure than Neal's. He was a quiet, cold-blooded gentleman enough, possessed of a rare amount of patience, and a rarer amount of common sense; but the idea troubled him, too, not a little, for he wasted money—money for Addie—over it. Mr. Pike held fast, however, to the cold-blast idea. He was conscious of an approximation to his reward, and he had that rare faith in things turning out well, which is the one blessing that falls to inventors. He was not quite correct in his theories, but he would not give up the project yet awhile as hopeless. Now and then, as we have said, a spasm would cross him as he thought

of all that he had expended in experiments, of how much money he had robbed from Ada, for whom he was saving carefully and diligently; but there was hope in advance of him yet, and with that hope was Ada's fortune. Mr. Pike did not think of his own aggrandizement, of any one who, in the future, might be dearer to him than his niece; this quiet being took little thought for himself, and put himself invariably on one side, as a matter of course.

Mr. Pike was inclined, like Neal, to become absorbed in his model, but Ada bore the distraction better than Neal's wife. She was not of a jealous temperament, and possessed the power of self-absorption in a great degree herself. She had been ever a busy little woman—an indefatigable chapel-goer, and worker in the service of her pastors and masters—much too good a character for a novel; but here she is, with all her virtues notwithstanding, and we hope, presently, that an honest failing or two will relieve her character from insipidity.

Mr. Pike was busy with his papers, then—deep in fresh calculations, and walking in and out of the room to his workshop at the back, where his

furnace was in full flare that night. He had expected Neal that evening, but had given him up at last, and commenced working for himself.

It was striking eight when he came into the parlour again, very hot and flustered.

"The furnace is uncommonly obstinate to-night, Addie," he said. "If I were a profane man, I really think that I should swear a little."

"No nearer the great secret, uncle, then?"

"Not much nearer, at all events."

A rapid fantasia on the knocker occurred at this moment.

"Neal's knock," said Pike. "I'm glad of that. I had nearly given him up."

But it was not Neal whom the small maid ushered into the room the instant afterwards, but a tall young man, into whose somewhat pale face Pike stared in amazement.

"Not—not Walter Tressider?"

"Ay! but it is!" said Walter, shaking him heartily by the hand. "Did you think that I had said good-bye to all good friends for ever? And Miss Merton, too," he said, turning to that young lady, who was regarding him wistfully from the other side of the room, "whom I have had the pleasure

of seeing more than once before—or frightening more than once before. Which was it?"

"Frightening, perhaps—for you were wild, and melo-dramatic, and unreal!" was the quick answer.

"To be sure I was. But then my wild fit was on—and I fancied that I was going headlong to ruin. I was always a little extravagant."

"Yes," added Pike, "in more ways than one!"

"You will have to congratulate me now, sir," said Tressider. "I'm a steady old file, saving money for a rainy day—which is the same as making hay whilst the sun shines."

"Yes—almost the same," said Pike, dubiously. "Sit down, Walter. Have you seen your uncle yet?"

"Not yet—I shall face him presently, though—I bear him no malice—I never bore malice in my life, Pike."

"That's true."

Walter Tressider sat down, drew off his gloves, produced a pocket-book, and then took therefrom two five-pound notes.

"Nine pounds, fifteen shillings—I said that I would pay you first of all of them; there's your money, with many thanks, sir."

"Dear me, this is very remarkable!" ejaculated Pike; "then you really have been saving, Walter?"

"A little. Not much to *bounce* about at present."

"I am so glad—I really am so very glad!"

And Mr. Pike proceeded to shake Walter by the hands again.

"Perhaps you will come back to the old desk, and begin life afresh; many more like you—ah! and as wild as you—have turned away from the broad road at the eleventh hour, and become estimable members of society."

"Why, was I not always an estimable member of society?" cried Walter Tressider with a laugh; "what do you mean by that?"

"I'll not draw the picture of what you were, Walter."

"It wouldn't frighten me," said Walter, a little conceitedly; "I was never a *bad sort.* I helped my friends with my last sovereign, and lost a little faith in human nature when I found my friends disinclined to help *me;* but I did my best, after my own fashion—and if it were a queer fashion sometimes, why, it hurt no one but myself."

"I never thought that you were anything but a

gay man—I did not consider yon absolutely vicious."

"Thank you," said Walter, drily; "and can you tell me why I was not vicious?"

"The tracts I gave you, possibly?" suggested Pike.

"Hem!—not exactly. I was in love."

"Oh!"

"Really in love, Mr. Pike—even engaged to be married for a little while, till my common sense warned me of the trouble that I should bring to more than myself. Then I broke away from the spell like—a hero."

"You come back now to renew that engagement," said Mr. Pike; "well, it will do you good. It's honourable—it's the best thing that can happen to a young man to be engaged!"

"Hark at your uncle, Miss Merton," said Walter, who was in high spirits that evening; "what engagement has kept him steady, I wonder?"

"Perhaps I do not practise all I preach," he said; "but the advice is good enough, for all that. Marry early and settle down to life's duties with an earnest resolve to do your best."

"I hope young Galbraith has profited by your advice, Mr. Pike?" said Tressider; "he's a steady

young fellow, whom you have had all to yourself."

"Yes—he's very steady—a good, earnest young man enough. You will find him altered very much for the better since his marriage."

"Since his—what did you say?"

"Since his marriage, I said, Walter."

"Oh!—indeed!"

Walter Tressider let his hands drop to his side for a moment, then clasp themselves between his knees, as he sat facing Mr. Pike. From the opposite side of the room, in the shadows of the evening stealing on apace in Crow Street, watched Mr. Pike's niece, more closely than Mr. Pike himself. Mr. Pike was not so keen an observer as Addie, and remarked no change in the demeanour of his visitor, who played his part well, and stood manfully against the shock which he knew then was coming against him with full force.

"Who's the—happy maid?" he asked, with affected carelessness.

He knew all then—he guessed all. Looking back to the time when he and Neal walked up and down the Southwark streets, and discoursed of each other's prospects, he remembered Neal's inquiries

concerning Carry Webber; his own foolish, reckless advice to that youth, uttered in bitterness of spirit, and with a heavy heart. He thought himself a hero then to talk so coolly—now he felt himself a fool?

"He married a Miss Webber."

"I have—met the lady. So young Galbraith's married, then—well, it's jumping in a hurry at the responsibilities, and I—admire his pluck. How long is it ago?"

Pike told him, but he did not appear to pay much attention to the answer. He sat looking down at the floor, and clasping his hands still more tightly together—the face that had seemed bright and happy enough upon its entrance, had altered very much, or else the twilight deepened very rapidly in Crow Street.

Still he bore up well, for he aroused no suspicion in Mr. Pike's breast. He was to Mr. Pike the same Walter Tressider of old, only a trifle improved with the good luck that had come to him. But his heart was wrung, and not the less terribly for the want of preparation.

For this man had really loved Carry Webber, as well as he could love anything in life;—parting

with her, giving her up in the face of an adversity that he could not ask her to share, he had been sorely tried; but to come back to talk of better times, and find how quickly she had taken him at his word, that was the hardest trial of all! If she had only waited but a short while, and not so readily have forgotten him;—if she could have borne with home a little longer for his sake! Well, it was all over; it was too late; it was like his luck! He had never been a lucky man;—he did not believe now that he should ever be a successful one; his was a mode of living dependent on the fashion of the hour, and as for what became of him, why, just that minute it did not matter in the least.

"What are you doing, may I ask again, Walter?" said Mr. Pike, in louder tones.

It was the repetition of a previous question, to which Tressider had afforded no reply.

"What am I doing?—earning from eight to twelve pounds a-week."

"Oh! dear—on the stage?"

"Yes. The stage answers pretty well, overstocked as it is by ambitious sucklings. I made a success of it in a small way—not in tragedy, but in comedy—sheer against my inclination. But it pays

as well as anything that I can expect—better than anything I deserve."

"It's a little derogatory, is it not?"

"I don't see it," said Walter, "and I don't care if it be. I shall not disgrace the time-honoured name of Tressider, however—to the world I am Theodore Raymond, late principal walking gentleman of all the out-of-the-way provincial houses."

Mr. Pike groaned.

"You are in the midst of temptation, Walter."

"I don't see that either. And I should not object if I were, for I like temptation. There's a novelty about it."

"Hush!—don't speak like that," said Addie, with excitement; "you are talking desperately, and don't know what you are saying."

"I beg your pardon," said Tressider—"I am reproved. No, perhaps I don't mean all that I say. I have come a long journey by rail, and the rattle, rattle of the train is in my ears still."

Another knock at the door at this juncture—Neal's knock this time. Neal Galbraith entered the moment afterwards, flushed and excited, as though he had been running.

"The old gentleman woke up this morning as

bright as heaven, Mr. Pike!" he cried on entering; "he has been working all day at the new idea, and we'll essay the experiment whilst the conception's fresh upon him. Wish us all good luck, Miss Merton."

"With all my heart."

"I shall be glad when we have the subject off our minds for good, and the money in our pockets. Never another chase after discoveries whilst I live! What!—Tressider!"

Neal had run on very rapidly, taking but little notice of the new-comer, and setting him down for one of "the dissenting gang," as he irreverently called it, until his old fellow-clerk rose from his chair and faced him.

"Yes, Galbraith—the black sheep *redivivus!*"

They shook hands together, looking intently at each other meanwhile.

"You have altered very much, Galbraith. Why, you are ten years the older man," said Tressider.

"I have caught my father's disease early in life, and it's almost too much for my strength," said Neal in reply; "but the worst is over, and the world is brightening."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Thank you, Tressider. But my father—I had forgotten—he——"

"He is not here!" exclaimed Pike.

"Yes—he is here, full of a new variation to an old scheme; if it be a failure this time we must give it up. My father is in the hall, arranging his papers."

"No, I have done that, Neal," said the old gentleman, who had been bowing at the door for several minutes, and who now entered the room, followed by the maid-servant with lights. "I have been standing there, and no one taking any notice of me, for some time. Who's this, did you say?"

The old gentleman crossed the room, and looked intently into Walter Tressider's face. The name of the old antagonist was fresh with him yet, and it was too late to remedy the error.

"This is a friend of mine," said Neal.

"You called him Tressider?"

"Well—yes."

"A friend of yours, then!—how can that be?" said the little man, looking back at his son fiercely. "Was it not the Tressiders who ruined us—who fought us from court to court, until my

brain gave way? Whose force of money got the better of our honesty of purpose, and crushed us with its weight! I hate the name!—it overshadows ours, and ever will! It has been our ruin! What right have you to call a Tressider your friend, Neal?"

Neal was quick enough to seize the best method of explanation at hand. It had been an unlucky meeting, and had startled his father from his equanimity; but he must put, if possible, a better face upon it at once.

"The Tressiders, father, have been our friends for some time. When we were going to ruin, and there seemed no chance for you and me, a Tressider—the uncle of this gentleman—stepped forward, gave me a post of trust, and rendered us both independent of the world! Why, but for him, I do not know what would have become of you and me?"

Mr. Galbraith looked in a bewildered manner at his son; he dropped his papers on the carpet, and held his large forehead between his hands and stared.

"What Tressider was that, then?"

"The man who was not so bad at heart as you

and I imagined, when we were fighting our hard battle with him."

"Wasn't he!—I know better than that! Good God! then it's that Tressider—the very man—who——"

"Who has been kind to me—paid me liberally for services of very little value—and done his best to make me a good clerk."

"And you have kept this from me all this while?"

"You were very weak, sir, when I first entered Mr. Tressider's employ. I have been waiting for the day when you should be stronger."

"Everybody treats me like a child!" moaned the old man; "and to think that a Galbraith should be servant to a Tressider! Why, it's not showing a proper spirit, lad!"

"That's an expensive luxury," said Neal, trying to turn the whole matter into a jest.

"I don't see anything to smile at," said Mr. Galbraith severely. "This is a hard day for me! I hate the Tressiders—I pray for their ruin every night, Neal!" he added in a husky whisper; "just as I pray for your advancement!"

"Good gracious, sir!" ejaculated Mr. Pike, his

hands flung aloft in horror; "pray for a fellow-creature's ruin!"

"He ruined me—he never cared for me—this man's uncle! Were he on his dying bed, I would not forgive him! Don't you know that we Galbraiths come of an unforgiving race?"

"I did not know that," responded Mr. Pike; "I'll not believe it!"

He thought so afterwards—in the days stealing on towards him, he could believe it in the son, as well as in the father.

"You and I, father, will have a long talk about this at a more fitting opportunity," said Neal. "We must not forget our new ideas in arguing upon what was right or wrong in my case."

"Oh! yes!" said Mr. Galbraith, picking up his papers, and darting a look of intense scorn at Walter Tressider; "we're sure to begin new ideas, and show the way to new discoveries, with a Tressider in the house. That's a more capital joke than the last, which you wanted me to laugh at!"

"Pray do not let me stand in the way!" said Tressider. "I have transacted all my business here, and will be going."

"When you are gone, I'll begin to think—not before," said Mr. Galbraith, determinately. "Neal, perhaps you had better see him out of the house, and along the street."

"Very well, sir," said Neal, repressing a smile.

"My son thought of leaving me here to-night," said Mr. Galbraith, "and keeping his wife company at home. She is not very well. There has been just a little difference between her and me about——"

"I thought, Mr. Pike," said Neal, interposing here, "that you and my father might study the matter together to-night; and that my father might come home to-morrow morning by the 'bus. A long, quiet evening with him is our best chance, after all."

"But you—"

"And then you and I to-morrow, Mr. Pike, until we bring the gold to the bottom of the crucible."

"I shall be very happy to study with Mr. Galbraith," said Pike, "taking my lesson from the hands of one so famous."

Mr. Galbraith bowed and smirked at the compliment. He was coming round by degrees, and

Mr. Pike's flattery—though it was simply the veneration of the tyro for the master—set him more at his ease.

"We shall succeed, if we're—we're only clear about the head," said Mr. Galbraith, "and there's nobody near to worry us. That young woman will not mind going upstairs for a bit, I hope."

"Oh! no," said Addie, laughing.

"And you'll see, Neal, that that man don't slip away from you, and come back here. He's a Tressider—beware of him!"

"I'll take care of him, sir."

"Don't encourage his acquaintance," continued Mr. Galbraith, without any concern for the feelings of the person alluded to; "he's of a bad stock, you know. Be always on your guard against him, and keep him from this house to-night, for we are going to succeed, Neal!"

"I hope so."

Neal and Walter Tressider prepared to depart. As they were passing from the room, Ada Merton touched our hero's arm, and drew him back a little.

"Are you two, great friends?" she asked in a low tone.

"Not very great friends—why?"

"Because—for, for—your father's sake—I would not become intimate with him."

"Do you distrust this man, then?"

Ada thought for a moment, then answered fearlessly.

"No."

"I have always thought him a weak man, but only his own enemy," said Neal.

"He has come to-night to pay off an old debt; he is honourable, but for all that, he is not the friend that you should choose."

"I shall make no friend of him, Miss Merton," said Neal. "I never make friends; I'm too hard a man."

Neal said it half in jest and half in earnest, for he half believed in his own sternness, now.

Walter Tressider and our hero went together into Crow Street. Tressider passed his arm through our hero's.

"It's like old times to come back again," said Tressider; "and though I don't return a happy man, and have received an awful shock to-night—I will tell you some day what it was—still I am glad to see you all."

"You come back with better fortune, Tressider. I am glad to hear that."

"Yes, I have been lucky in my way. With perseverance, I shall turn out a successful mountebank."

He gave a brief sketch of his career to Neal—disguising nothing, and winning our hero to him by his openness.

"And you are married, Galbraith," he said at last; "you made your mind up very speedily, after our last meeting."

"Yes, she was unhappy at home, and I thought that, even with a small salary to begin life with, I could make her happy."

Did Neal think so now?—or was there, despite him, a ring of sadness in his tones?

"She is well, I hope?"

"You shall judge for yourself, Tressider."

"I—I am engaged this evening, I think," said Tressider, turning very red for an instant.

"You and Carry are old friends. She will be glad to see you and talk over the old theatrical times—it will be a change for her, for we keep very little company."

Walter Tressider did not respond. He walked

on, and seemed counting his footsteps to himself.

"It will be your only chance, if my father stick to the Tressider antipathy," urged Neal, "and I will get you to talk of the plays, and cheer her up by the reminiscence. I have rather wearied her lately with my one theme, and feel just in the humour for a pleasant evening. I never remember being in such high spirits, Tressider."

"It's the forerunner of good fortune, Galbraith. I have felt the same myself."

"You'll come and spend an hour with us?"

"Thank you. I fancy that I should like to see Mrs. Galbraith for a little while!"

CHAPTER VIII.

TRESSIDER'S ORDEAL.

NEAL GALBRAITH was anxious to step out of the common track, and take Walter Tressider home to supper with him—anxious to vary the monotony of every-day life, by bringing back an old friend to Carry. There had been a faint difference that day—Mr. Galbraith, senior, had objected to any intrusion upon his studies, and been more than extra irritable over his plans; and when Neal had returned, he had monopolized all Neal's attention, until Carry had protested and given way—just a little! It had been hastily made up again, for Neal was in high spirits, and thought that he saw the beginning of the end of this new cold-blast scheme. Neal took his father off to Crow Street, to prosecute the researches before the furnace itself, promising to return early, and keep Carry

company the rest of the evening—and the chance of bringing back an old friend with him was too good to be missed. Neal was not a distrustful man; he knew that there had been a leaning of a tender character in Tressider's heart towards Carry, perhaps a girlish affection of Carry for Tressider—but he had the good English notion that marriage cancelled all past likings, and he was above all fear of rivalry. He had not given a thought to a rival; Carry was his wife, and there was an end to the story. Carry had liked him better than Tressider before marriage, or she would not have chosen him for a husband—and as for liking any one better afterwards, that might do for a French novel, but not in the real, pure life he had mapped out for Carry and himself.

In the future, with experiments off his mind, and his position better assured, Neal often thought how much happier he and Carry would be together! He was pained that Carry was not happier already—less prone to jealousy, less impulsive and inconsiderate; but in his heart he was sanguine of the brighter time. They were still a very young couple, he was aware; they had married in haste, and without a due appreciation of each other's

character; for a matter-of-fact world, they had been a trifle too unreal. They had tried to settle down at once, without understanding each other, and it would have resulted in failure, had not his mind been stronger than his years. But he was steady and practical, he thought, and he could not become a slave to his affection, and grow childish in consequence. No one knew—not even Carry herself—how much he loved his young wife; how in the future he was always picturing forth her happiness with him, but hiding the view from her, lest something should step between them and disappoint her too keenly. She was sanguine enough at times, without his fancy picturing; let him appear content with the present, and settle down to it, rather than unsettle her by vain imaginings. She would become resigned then to the present, and the change for the better would ensue in due course, and he could tell her how he had hoped and worked for it.

He was sorely troubled at times to see how grave she had become—how reserved and thoughtful. Still Neal forgot himself in his schemes, and thought but little of her reproofs—for he was working for their advancement, and it was

unjust of her to complain. If she was not content with the present, it seemed unkind to murmur at her struggles to make the future brighter—and only his love for her prevented him resenting it. He had begun to see that hers was a childish, fretful disposition, that made troubles out of nothing; and yet he did not treat her like a child, and win her to him by his smiles. He played the master, and lost many chances; he was moulding her to his will, he fancied, and, alas! he was only making her heart ache!

Possibly some dreamy idea of being on the wrong tack led him to press Walter Tressider to accompany him home. Carry had been low-spirited lately, and this old friend might help to give a turn to her thoughts. She and Tressider might speak of the old private-theatrical days—they would be reminiscences to laugh over again, and he could join in, and speak of his special mission to Richmond, and how he had brought about an anti-climax to "Othello." Tressider could tell them, too, of his new experience of life, and would be excellent company—as he always had been from a child, for that matter.

They went home together to Fife Street, for

reasons akin to these, then, and Walter Tressider and Carry met once more in life.

It was a meeting that startled Carry at the outset; she had not anticipated the old love suddenly emerging from the past into that front room; but she stood her ground well, and after an instant's embarrassment, was the young hostess self-assured and calm. Mr. Tressider took a longer period to subside, for he had thought of Carry till a later day; only a little while ago he had written, believing her to be a single woman, and offering her his hand again, reminding her—and the thought made him blush then—that he had kept true to her memory, and loved her better than ever. For a short while, it was an unpleasant sensation to think that she was Neal's wife, and that he had hopes of her being his until two hours ago; then the sober facts marshalled themselves before him, and he was once more Walter Tressider.

He would show husband and wife that he was a man to be trusted; doubtless they both knew the depth and extent of his folly, and pitied him for his weakness—but they could place confidence in him, and he was not a man to fall in love with anybody else's wife.

It was the very evening that Neal had anticipated. After the awkward preliminaries had been got over, Tressider assumed his characteristic demeanour, and spoke of his success—such as it was—in life. Carry grew animated also; the old times drifted once more to the foreground, and the gossip upon stage heroics were subject matter that made the hours fly.

"It is pleasant to come back and find oneself not quite alone in the world," said Tressider. "I hope that you will let me drop in now and then and see you both. I am a desolate old bachelor enough, and Fife Street will be a pleasant refuge from my morbidity?"

"We must obtain the consent of my father, then, Tressider," said Neal, laughing.

"Leave him to me, and I'll try my persuasive vein," said Walter. "I shall be very dull after my success at the Thespian, and I shall have nowhere to go. Fancy a man in London without friends!"

"Where have the old ones gone, Tressider?"

"All vanished into thin air—and I do not care to grope in the mists after them. You don't know what a steady, matter-of-fact fellow I'm becoming. I'm to be trusted now—I am, indeed!"

He spoke almost beseechingly, as though there had been a time when no one had had faith in his steadiness. He turned to Carry, pleading also with his earnestness, and she flinched a little at it.

"I never had a true male friend, Mrs. Galbraith —and that's why I grew reckless and improvident, and went to the bad. I should like to sober down for my credit's sake now. You cannot think how I have changed, either of you. I paid half my debts to-day—and startled all my old creditors hugely. I shall be what Pike calls 'a burning light' presently!"

"That's well!" said Neal.

"I took a fancy to you, Neal, long ago, but you would not have anything to do with me. Quite right then, old fellow—I own that."

"We shall be glad to see you here," said Neal, "when your engagements will allow of looking us up in the evening."

"Thank you—that is kind of you. That will keep me out of harm's way, and from you, ever steady and practical, I shall learn my lesson of dogged perseverance. Just for a time, till I break down again!"

"What's that?"

"I don't know—I'm not quite settled, after all. I always was a hare-brained scamp, whom nobody could trust. On second thoughts, I shan't come near you. What's the good of a fellow like me harassing you with my vagaries?"

He bade husband and wife good night, and then came again into the room before Neal could follow him to the street-door.

"I wish you two could fancy that I am a different Walter Tressider from this night. I could fall readily enough into the character, if you helped me. I want you both to trust me—to think that I am a good fellow, who would not hurt a hair of any other fellow's head. That impression with you two—that impression with me—and I *could* come here, and feel it was a friend's house!"

"It's an impression easily conveyed to us," said Neal, assuringly.

"Then, the past submerged for ever—it's a bargain! Why, Galbraith, I feel lighter at the thought. It's a bargain, Mrs. Galbraith!" he said, turning to the wife.

"Yes," responded Carry, guessing all that he intended to convey, and thinking, perhaps, that it was best.

He went away light-hearted, and excited—a man for Neal and his wife to wonder at after his departure.

"I can't make him out exactly," said Neal; "he's a good-hearted fellow enough—but, great heavens, what a weak man!"

"Yes—he is weak," said Carry, thoughtfully.

"I don't see how a man like that can make much way in the world," mused Neal. "In his profession he must meet strange characters, who will render him their dupe, or lead him on to their follies. In good hands he might turn out a bright man—but in bad ones, Carry?"

"In bad hands he would descend to ruin."

"I would not have half his instability for the world."

"You are always firm, Neal," said Carry; "but are you any the happier for that?"

"Pushing on to one goal may lead to happiness, my girl."

"Ah!" sighed Carry, "yours is not a happy nature."

"Patience," he said, drawing her closer to his heart, "we shall see in good time. You don't quite understand me yet."

"I never shall. Oh! Neal," with a frightened look into his face, "I fear that I never shall."

"Yes, you will. Patience, Carry—and faith."

Carry was happy that night; Neal was at his best—the dawn of success was with him, and his heart was lighter; she saw her husband then as she had seen him before marriage, when his cares were fewer and there was more romance about him. She drew inwardly the comparison between the two men who had sat face to face together that night, and there was no sigh for that which was unalterable. God be thanked if the brighter days were coming in due course! She would not mar their advent by a word; she would say nothing even of Walter Tressider's last letter; it belonged to a past time, and Tressider had wished the past abjured. His manner implied that he withdrew that passionate appeal to her whom he believed still single, and Carry thought it best to let it float away down-stream with the other memories she was learning to outlive.

* * * * * *

Meanwhile, Walter Tressider had walked slowly homewards, pondering on the incidents of the evening he had spent in Fife Street. He congratulated

himself on the manner in which he had faced the old love; the cool and easy manner in which he had played his part that night. All his life had been spent in congratulating himself on a variety of achievements!

Only that night a bitter disappointment, and yet, before the night was over, facing her whom he had made up his mind to marry, and then found for ever set apart from him. He felt that it was for the best, and that Neal would make her a better husband than it would have ever lain in his power to do; but the disappointment was none the less bitter as he brooded over it in his homeward route. He had made up his mind to settle down, and now he was more unsettled than ever. What was the good of turning over a new leaf when the page beyond was blank and purposeless? What did it matter what became of him now? Then his variable nature leaped to a less morbid conclusion, and he thought that if he tried to settle down, and took a lesson from Neal Galbraith's patience, all would come right in time. He should forget Carry quickly enough—his love seemed to drop away like a cloak the moment he learned that she was married—she could never have cared much for him,

or she would have waited longer, even after his formal resignation of her.

It was all over, and he was beginning life anew. He should be a popular man amongst the frequenters of the Royal Thespian; he should fall in love again in good time, and sober down for good. He was content with the present even, and, to show his contentment, he burst suddenly into tears, and turned up a dark court to hide them from the passers-by.

Yes, Walter Tressider was weak enough.

CHAPTER IX.

"FOUNDED ON FACT."

THE cold-blast principle, or the improvement on the cold-blast principle—we do not profess to clearly indicate the nature of Mr. Galbraith's discovery—made vast strides towards success after the last idea had been studied in Crow Street between Mr. Pike and the inventor. The two Galbraiths and Mr. Pike were in a fair way to see the end accomplished, in good time they thought.

Meanwhile, the business of Mr. Tressider, metal merchant, Shad Thames way, seemed to be stagnating, after its usual fashion; the orders were few; the deliveries of stock from Birmingham were fewer; there appeared no occasion for extra clerks, correspondence clerks, or anything; Mr. Tressider, senior, could have managed all the business himself, and found some time to spare, for that matter.

Neal saw that an end must come to the firm in which he was employed, or else that it was a business more mysterious than even he had bargained for; and in the middle of August the end came, as foreseen.

Mr. Tressider, senior, issued from his counting-house one morning with two cheques in his hand, and laid one on Mr. Pike's desk, and the other on Neal's.

"There are your salaries to Michaelmas, gentlemen," he said coolly; "you need not come any more after next Saturday. We shut up for good, then."

"I did not expect this quite so suddenly, Mr. Tressider," said Pike.

"Oh! then you did expect it at some time or other?"

"Yes, sir."

"It has been a good fight—I shall break up without owing any man a farthing, or being left a farthing in my turn. And yet the world will always say what a scamp that Tressider was!"

"If we went on a little longer, perhaps——"

"Mr. Pike, the proverb says, when things are at their worst they must mend. I say, when things

are at their worst they must smash! You, Mr. Galbraith "—turning sharply round on Neal—"don't seem disposed to say anything."

"I am very sorry, sir, that misfortune has befallen you so suddenly."

"It was not suddenly; it has been coming on for years. All my life, I have been a poor man. You look surprised," he added, seeing that Neal betrayed astonishment at this; "but I am in no mood for explanation. You, Mr. Galbraith, are not disposed to idle time away?"

"No, sir."

"Mr. Jennings is in want of a clerk, and will take you into his service next week. I have spoken a word for you in that quarter."

"You are very kind, sir," said Neal, still more surprised at this evidence of interest in his progress.

"If Mr. Pike will take my advice, he will set up in business for himself."

"And you, sir?" asked Pike.

"Oh! that's a matter of very little consequence," said the old man drily; "what becomes of old Tressider will not affect the world's composure. I shall go my own way, and take comfort from the

surroundings. You know what a philosopher I am," he added with a sneer.

"If you——"

"Spare me any suggestions, Mr. Pike," said Mr. Tressider, with dignity; "I am master until the end of the week, remember. I shall not be greatly affected by the change of circumstance. I am prepared for the coolness of my friends—all the rebuffs incidental to my lower estate. Such things will amuse me—my faith in the earnest intentions of the world was never very great."

"No, sir."

"Ah! you agree with me!" said Mr. Tressider. "Perhaps you have found it a bad world lately?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Pike a second time, and with a different emphasis.

"There's nothing good in it," added Mr. Tressider. "I have no faith in it—I never had. Each one for himself, in this world; and woe betide the wight who is underfoot, and wants help! Each one fighting hard for his own interest, and crushing the life out of all opposed to him, if the power be in his hand. It's as bad a world as can be. I made that discovery when I was a boy."

When he was a stripling of nineteen, and his

pretty cousin, to whom he was to be married, ran away with some one else she liked better than he, he might have added.

But he was not thinking of that *escapade*, and he never believed that it had given a turn to his character. He was a man who had always professed to be above excitement, and perhaps the effort to maintain his composure had aged and hardened him before his time.

Neal had not been able to understand his employer; he had even made more than one attempt to keep all sympathy aloof from him. Neal was too good a business man not to perceive that things were going wrong with Mr. Tressider; and Mr. Tressider's stoicism under misfortune would have aroused his admiration, had he allowed it. But this man had been the means of his father's ruin—fighting an obstinate nature with its own weapon, and, by the very force of the resistance, hurling his father to the dust. He could not pity or admire such a man; and he shut his heart against him, and forgot all obligations.

Later in the day, Mr. Tressider appeared again in the office. The master was unsettled, despite his assumed equanimity; he had never been quite

so near ruin before, and it was not pleasant even for a philosopher to contemplate.

He walked up and down the office with his hands in his pockets for a while, stopping at last before Neal's desk.

"What is your address, Mr. Galbraith?" he said, suddenly.

"My address, sir?"

"Yes. It is necessary that I should know it—that Mr. Jennings should know it."

Neal told him. There was no longer any occasion for secrecy.

"Your father, I presume, never became aware that a Montague was serving in the house of a Capulet?"

"Yes, sir—by chance, a short while since."

"He was very much surprised, I suppose?"

"He could not comprehend my motives—sometimes I think that he has never forgiven me."

"He must be a queer old fellow," mused Mr. Tressider, as he recommenced his perambulations.

Neal was perplexed at his employer's eccentricity; he was sorry also for the downfall of the house, as a good servant is always sorry under similar circumstances. All that day he was full

of thought—wondering what turn his own affairs would take, and whether Jennings would be likely to have him as clerk, on the mere recommendation of his employer? If not, how would the world treat him?—what would become of Carry, his father and him?

The next day, Mr. Pike watched his opportunity to speak to Mr. Tressider. He had been restless and fidgety all the morning, until Mr. Tressider appeared.

"I have been looking over some papers of mine, sir," he said, stammering and blushing; "and it has struck me that you—you wouldn't mind—just for once—reading a little paper written by my friend, Mr. Hedger, a very worthy man. It is so applicable to your present case, sir."

"Made to order, perhaps," said Mr. Tressider, taking the paper which Mr. Pike had extended to him; "what's this?—'Comfort in the Hour of Tribulation.' My dear sir, when will you leave off this ridiculous habit of tract distributing—I don't want any comfort.

'I exist within myself, not comfortless.'"

He thrust the paper back into Mr. Pike's hands,

and went into his room. Pike looked at Neal, and shook his head.

"It's very odd how people object to tracts, Neal. And there is no telling the good they effect."

"They have an unpleasant habit of dropping in at unseasonable times," said Neal; "and you are," he added, laughing at his companion's confusion, "a trifle too energetic with them. Fancy consoling Mr. Tressider with a tract, sir!"

"I should like to console him, if I only knew the way," said this good-hearted, blundering being; "I have been a long time in his service, and he has never let me console him once."

The man who objected to consolation, even from his senior clerk, was to embarrass Neal before the week was out. This was on the Saturday, when Mr. Tressider, senior, entered no appearance all day, and the clerks left without bidding him good-bye in consequence. Neal had reached Fife Street in his homeward route, when the old master passed his arm through his.

"Good evening, Mr. Galbraith," he said, quite cheerfully; "the worst is over—suspense is at an end, and I'm as light as a feather! Which is your house?"

"Mr. Tressider!" exclaimed Neal, "I did not expect to find you in this neighbourhood."

"It's within an easy distance of the Queen's Bench," said Mr. Tressider, "and the madhouse is at the back of the street, I find."

"This is grim jesting, sir."

"I was always fond of my joke in a quiet way," observed Mr. Tressider; "now, where is this father of yours? I wish to see him."

"For what possible reason, sir?"

"I have my reason—I think that it's a good one."

Neal deliberated, then led the way to his house.

"I don't see any harm that can arise now—my father is a stronger man, and it may do him good to see you."

"To see me in adversity, and to know that I am no richer man than he is," said Mr. Tressider sharply; "why, who's jesting grimly now, sir?"

Neal coloured—the idea had struck him for an instant, and he had given voice to it. He saw that he had not spoken charitably, and hastened to excuse himself, but Mr. Tressider evaded his apology.

"I am of your opinion too, and we'll turn jest to earnest," he said; "so this is your place?"

As they stood at the door, whilst Neal sought for his latch-key, it might have been remarked that Mr. Tressider's philosophy was at fault. Mr. Tressider turned somewhat pale, and the lines in his face, for an instant, seemed to deepen.

"Its an odd freak to come hither," he said, more to himself than to our hero; "I wonder what good I can do *now*?"

Neal opened the door, and went upstairs, followed by his strange companion. He hastened to prepare his father for the surprise, before his employer entered on the scene.

The old gentleman was at the table by the window, busy with pencil and paper—working briskly, and even humming merrily over his work. Carry sat at the other window, with some needlework in her lap—she had been sitting there, watching for Neal's appearance.

"Father, a gentleman wishes to see you; and, I think, to express some regret for the trouble incurred by a long law-suit in which he was defendant. Am I right, Mr. Tressider?" turning to that gentleman, who had now entered the room.

"Thank you for my cue, Mr. Galbraith. Yes, quite right."

Mr. Galbraith, senior, put down his pencil, and leaned back in his chair, to stare at the intruder. Then his hands wandered to his temples in the old fashion, as though to steady his head to bear the shock of this surprise.

"So—so you're the man!"

"I have been making up my accounts—winding up all matters connected with business, Mr. Galbraith—doing my best to prove to the world that mine was an honest, genuine bit of ruin, without any humbug about it. My books will bear the light of day upon them—it was a steady run of ill luck, and nothing prospered with me. So I came to beggary."

"You beggared?—you, the Tressider who beggared me?"

"Yes."

"I'm very glad to hear it!" and the old gentleman drew his snuff-box from his pocket, and took a pinch therefrom with evident gusto.

"I thought it would be pleasant news for you, and that I would bring it myself," was the caustic reply.

"You're very kind, I'm sure, sir. Do you take snuff?"

"Thank you—now and then."

Mr. Tressider took the snuff-box extended to him, and followed the example of Mr. Galbraith. Then he drew a chair close to the table, on which some plans were spread, and which were immediately whisked away from his sight, and passed the snuff-box back to his old antagonist.

"You have altered very much, Mr. Galbraith," said Tressider, "since you and I used to catch glimpses of each other in the law courts—what a tough fight it was between us!"

"Ah!—it was!"

"I daresay that I have preyed upon your mind for many years—been the one black thought which kept all light away, depressing you and yours!"

"That's true enough, sir."

"Well, a man who has never studied sentiment in his life, or cared for anyone's opinion, comes here to-night to ask you to forgive him?"

Mr. Galbraith pushed his chair back a little from the table, and looked hard at the speaker.

"I surprise you!" added Mr. Tressider—"that is very natural, for I surprise myself. But I have retired from business, and all my business habits are put on the shelf along with my bad debts. I

could have kept on two or three years more by borrowing large sums of money, and ruining others with myself. But I was methodical, and thought it preferable to beggar myself instead of my neighbours."

"You weren't so particular about beggaring people once."

"That was in the way of business."

"I know all about that, sir," said Mr. Galbraith tersely.

"And now you see that that way did not lead to fortune—that my attempts to rob you of your patent did not put a penny in my purse—that I am getting an old man, and would be at peace with those whom I have injured directly or indirectly,—I will ask you to shake hands."

Neal stood surprised at this new side to his employer's character; he was a wondering witness to this interview, and still at a loss to assign a reason for it. Not the only witness either, for Carry leaned upon her husband's shoulder, and looked on with interest, and Walter Tressider appeared as if by magic at the open door, and was arrested by the sight of his uncle sitting opposite Mr. Galbraith, and offering him his withered hand.

Mr. Galbraith, senior, possibly did not appear in the best light that day, but he had been the injured man, and he was always hard to move. He buttoned his coat to his chin, and then pushed himself further away from Mr. Tressider.

"No, sir—I shall not shake hands with you!" he said.

"I am sorry for that," replied Mr. Tressider—"it would have been an agreeable wind-up to my business life, and I could have begun afresh so nicely. Why, I have come three miles out of my way to tell you how sorry I was that the law-suit brought you to ruin."

"No matter, sir. I shall make another fortune if I keep my wits," said the old man quite proudly; "when I am better off, I may be disposed to think less seriously of all the harm that you have done me."

"You're very kind; but then your better thoughts will not avail me much. Now, they may."

"I won't shake hands!" said the old man, doggedly—"I can't forgive you. See what you have brought us too, and what a house this is to live in! You'll be able to understand what coming down in life is now."

"Possibly."

Mr. Tressider coolly began to draw on his right hand glove, a sign of the interview approaching a termination, and of his giving up further attempt at reconciliation with his old opponent. Neal made one effort—he scarcely knew for what reason, for his heart had been full of bitterness for many years also—to close the scene amicably.

"Father, I think that it would be a kind and graceful act to shake hands with Mr. Tressider. He has been unfortunate."

"No—not even for you, Neal," and Mr. Galbraith, senior, thrust his hands in his pockets, as though suspicious of a dash being made at them, and himself taken unawares; "I'll say nothing more about my wrongs, or of the judgment this is to that bad man —but I won't shake hands for anybody!"

"Why, bygones are bygones!" said the cheery voice of Walter Tressider behind them; "what does it matter now?"

"Ah! are you here?" said his uncle, turning round; "what brings a second Tressider to this place?"

"Oh! I am an old friend of Neal's."

"And of Neal's wife—whose pardon I must beg

for not addressing before," said Mr. Tressider, with a bow.

"The old firm has broken up then, sir?" asked Walter.

"It has subsided," corrected Mr. Tressider. "there was no bankruptcy—and no one a loser by me. I went on to my last shilling, and then wound up voluntarily."

"And you, sir—what will you do?"

"I begin afresh to-morrow."

"If I can be of any help——"

"Help yourself—don't forget that motto—it's a grand one."

After thus checking his nephew's offer of assistance, he again faced Mr. Galbraith, as though loath to part with him.

"I have one little light to throw upon our old battles, Mr. Galbraith," said Mr. Tressider; "I should not like to begin afresh without imparting to you that information. I have been a poor man all my life, and did not ruin you alone. It was a trade necessity to keep you down."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Galbraith.

"It was not a noble scheme of ours," said Mr.

Tressider; "but when you refused all terms but unconditional surrender, a few of us met together, at the suggestion of a Mr. Jennings, and resolved to fight it out, court after court, until we *finished* you. You wanted me for an example, and it seemed the cheapest way to make one, for I was not a great man in the trade; but then the trade backed me with all its force, upheld the wrong against the right, putting its gigantic wealth against your petty independence."

"This was conspiracy!" cried Neal.

"A conspiracy hard to prove, but acted very often, and in more trades than ours. Bless your soul, sir, it is a common plan to put down obtrusive inventors, who want the lion's share of profit. It deserves hanging, perhaps—I thought so myself, when the action had begun—when I was the scapegoat, and you were the victim—but I could not break away from the compact, and my share of the expenses was quite sufficient to bring about my ruin."

"I'm glad of that, sir," cried Mr. Galbraith.

"You have said so before, if you remember," was the cool reminder; "when we got the case to the House of Lords, you gave up and went mad, or something—and we had it all our own way. We

were rather sorry for the climax, and when your letter first came to me," he said to Neal, "it was understood that you and your family were to be protected by us in a paternal manner, for ever afterwards. The trade paid your salary, Mr. Galbraith," turning to Neal; "not I."

"The trade offers me a clerkship at Jennings'."

"Yes."

"I will starve before I take it!"

"Ah! you'll think better of that; it's no good flying into the heroics—it never answers. I have attempted sentiment to-night, but you see it don't pay. I think that I will go now."

He moved towards the door, and looked back at Galbraith the Inventor.

"You'll not shake hands, then?"

"Certainly not."

"I daresay my last explanation has made matters worse," added Mr. Tressider; "but I did not like to bear all the blame, especially as my wish was to clear up everything. Good day."

"Where are you going now, sir?" asked his nephew.

"To finish work, lad. Don't stop up the doorway—you were always in somebody's way, Walter."

"You spoke a little while ago of your last shilling," said Walter; "and hang it! one Tressider should help another."

"Did I ever help you?"

"Many times, sir; and if a little ungraciously, still I see the reason for that now."

"Ah! you were always wonderfully clear-sighted," said Mr. Tressider; "come round to-morrow to Shad Thames, and tell me of your last success, Walter. That will be a change at least."

He stretched his hand out to his nephew, and held it a moment in his own before relinquishing it; then he shook hands with Neal and his young wife.

"Good evening to all of you. And you," turning to Mr. Galbraith, senior, once more, "you will not, then?"

"Never, sir!"

Mr. Tressider heaved quite a sigh at the obduracy of his antagonist, as he went out of the room. Walter followed him, and Mr. Tressider called from the lower stairs:

"Don't come. I have to finish up to-night, and shall be busy. Any time to-morrow, Walter."

"I must be of help to you, sir—remember that."

"You are very kind—but remember what I said before, young prodigal!"

Mr. Tressider went back to Shad Thames—to his deserted office, where business was over for ever. He opened the little wicket in the great warehouse gates, and locked it behind him. Then, after walking about the yard for some time, and looking up at his warehouse—empty and desolate as his heart—he went into the counting-house, arranged some books methodically on the shelves behind the desks, muttered something about Pike and Neal not finishing off properly, and then passed into his own room, and turned the key for ever on his life!

END OF BOOK THE THIRD.

BOOK IV.

A LIFE'S MISTAKE.

CHAPTER I.

CARRY'S RELATIONS.

NEAL GALBRAITH kept his word, and entered not into Mr. Jennings's service. The last story that ever escaped Mr. Tressider's lips hindered him from seeking that position which he had been assured awaited him.

Neal's common sense would have got the better of his pride again, had the force of circumstances impelled him to self-abnegation; but he and Mr. Pike were hovering on the brink of a discovery, and it might set them above all clerkships. They were both quiet, careful men, however, and did not care to live on that hope; both knew the dangers of discovery, and the difficulties in the way of success. They were content to work patiently and wait, but not to sacrifice all their time in working for that which might end in illusion.

"Poor Mr. Tressider suggested that I should

set up in business for myself," said Mr. Pike to our hero; "but I haven't saved much money, and I should not like to lose it, and leave Addie penniless. I'll go round to some of the old customers, however, and see if they feel disposed to support me. You would not mind being my clerk, Neal—in the good time my partner?"

"If you think that I am worth taking into your service, Mr. Pike, I should like to be your right-hand man!"

"I wish you with me, of course—I can see after you then!"

Neal smiled at Mr. Pike's paternal solicitude.

"You'll not be twenty-one till the autumn, for all that old-looking face of yours. It's no good considering yourself a man yet."

"Just as you like, sir," said Neal.

Mr. Pike went round to the old customers, held a conference with some banking friends, who were fortunately dissenters and members of his particular sect, studied the dangers and difficulties in his way, and finally started in business for himself, retaining Neal Galbraith as his clerk.

Mr. Pike was well-supported, and began well. After the first two months, he said to Neal:

"We shall get over the quicksands in two years. In two years' time we'll talk 'about a partnership, Neal."

"What can I bring into the firm as my share?" said Neal, ruefully.

"Honesty and perseverance—first-rate things!" replied Pike. "What a lift it would give us in the world, though, if we could manage to work out your father's idea!"

They were still working at it—approaching the end, or receding from it—daunted now and then by the difficulties in the way of the experiments, but never wholly giving up. There were times when Pike would sigh still over the expense—he was always a careful man—and Neal and he would confer together on the advisability of sinking the project; but after that the inventor's fever would set in, and both would become restless and anxious once more.

Carry continued far from satisfied with the cold blast—that long, long study, from which seemed to evolve much gloom to Neal, and many solitary evenings to her. She did not think that she was jealous of Addie Merton now—jealous woman as Carry was; but her husband's frequent visits to

Crow Street vexed her more than she cared to confess. She was jealous of his time spent away from her—of that which seemed to her a something very like indifference to her society. She resented all this in her heart—she grieved over it, but she had resolved, if possible, to complain no more, for Neal's sternness on that night wherein she had faced him in Crow Street was with her yet a cruel memory.

When Neal was at home, Walter Tressider called, and spent an hour with them; in the early part of the evening, before his services were required at the Thespian. He was not such agreeable company as he used to be, and his uncle's death appeared for a while to have sobered him. Mr. Galbraith, senior, bore with his presence for Neal's sake, but he no more "took" to the nephew than he had taken to the uncle, and he sat glowering over his plans at the intruder. Mr. Galbraith's mind was becoming more strong; but his amiability and docility seemed making rapid retrogression. Carry sometimes thought it was a great pity that Mr. Galbraith had not remained mad all his life, although she did not express that opinion to Neal.

Still they were pleasant evenings when Neal was at home, and Walter Tressider looked in. They varied the monotony of existence, and Tressider seemed grateful for the home which was open to him. He was a man strangely isolated—and more than that, a man strangely changed. When his uncle's death was three months old, he came more often to Fife Street, apologizing always for his intrusion, and paying an attention to Neal that was almost deferential.

"Tell me when you're tired of my visits here, and I'll keep away," he said once; "but I really have nowhere else I care to go—I'm getting a downright misanthrope, Galbraith."

"Shake off that feeling, Tressider," Neal would say; "you must not bring the horrors into company."

Tressider would brighten up under the influence of his friends, after awhile; and the last hour he spent with them was always his brightest and best.

"I don't know what to make of him," Neal remarked to his wife, after one of these visits; "he must have something on his mind, I think."

Carry thought so too. She wondered at times

if *she* troubled his mind, and whether it were the morbid desire to see her and be near her that brought him so frequently to Fife Street. She had a suspicion that it was, and there was a faint pleasure—born of the one romance that had died with her marriage—in the fancy. Yet she had not one thought antagonistic to her wifely duty; she was a woman born to be dissatisfied in life—there are not a few such—but she had no foolish ideas of making a hero out of Walter Tressider. She saw that he was a poor, weak, ne'er-do-well—but if he loved her still, she could but pity him, although it was not right that he should come there.

Scarcely right; she would consider the matter more seriously, and then give Neal her opinion. Neal, full of his own projects, and with but little consideration for her, she thought, walked on blind to the signs upon the surface, and formed no opinion of his own. Did she take his perfect confidence for indifference, and think herself neglected?

Carry was troubled with these thoughts one day early in the new year—she was nineteen, and Neal was twenty-one, then—and was brooding over them,

with Mr. Galbraith at his eternal plans in the corner, when Mrs. Higgs burst into the room.

"Oh! good lor, Carry!—here's such a 'prise for you!"

"What is it?" asked Carry.

"Here's visitors to see you—what shall I do with 'em?"

"Show them upstairs, to be sure."

"I'm very busy just now," muttered Mr. Galbraith, without looking up; "if everybody lets me be quiet, I shall catch that idea at last, and it has worried my boy quite long enough."

"Who are they?" asked Carry, impatiently.

"It's Joe and his wife."

"Come to London again!" said Carry, her heart leaping at the novelty of meeting two who had at least been kind to her, and her dignity a little upset by the uncalled-for hint of Mr. Galbraith; "oh! how glad I shall be, too, to see them!"

"But——"

"Joe's my brother, and he has always been my friend. Do you think that I am ashamed of him, aunt—or that I gave him up when I married Neal?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Higgs, gravely regarding

her, "I never said so—you needn't be so 'pirited about it."

Carry ran downstairs to welcome Joe and his wife—presently returned, ushering in that gentleman, behind whom loomed the gigantic proportions of Mrs. Webber.

Mr. Galbraith quite jumped at the sight of the strange lady, rose for an instant at the hasty introduction of Carry's relations to him, sat down and stared and sighed. Oh! dear! what strange relations Neal had brought round him by his marriage!

"Hope your well, guv'nor!" said Joe, nodding familiarly to Mr. Galbraith; "and that we're not putting you out much by dropping in like this!"

"N–no—oh! no!" replied Mr. Galbraith, after a little consideration.

"You can't say we come too often—we're perfectly aware that we're a cut beneath Carry and her new connections, but we thought she wouldn't mind us looking in, for once."

"Mind, Joe!—I am very glad to see you!"

"And the Investment too, I hope," with a flourish of his hand towards his wife.

"My old friend—to be sure!"

Selina, pleased at her reception, folded her long arms round Mrs. Galbraith, and blessed her in a subdued voice. Then she sat down by the side of Joe, and Mrs. Higgs came in, as one of the family, and closed the door behind her.

Joe was not quite so disreputable as usual; his clothes had seen service, but were free from damage; and the pair of high-lows, which he somewhat ostentatiously displayed, had only that morning been resoled. As for the giantess, she had taken the show-muslin for every-day wear, as she communicated to Carry, before the interview was over; and Joe had purchased for her public wear, from a wardrobe in Oakley Street, Lambeth, a green silk skirt, a crimson body, and a white lace trimming.

"With a deep flounce, when we can afford it, it'll be a splendid fit, my dear."

Joe was magniloquent over his rise in life.

"I always made up my mind to keep away until I was presentable," said Joe. "I could tell that Neal wouldn't care to see us trooping in, for the sake of a dinner or a tea. When we wanted that sort of thing we kept away; but we've had a stroke of luck—Toppin's Circus has engaged us for

twelve months; and Selina and I are going round the country. I do the jumping through the hoops now, and uncommon good exercise it is!"

Carry sighed; and Joe added—

"It's not much to brag about—but it's an honest living."

"And it keeps Joe pretty straight," said Selina; "for if he takes too much before his turn comes on, he's likely to break his neck, and so that makes him careful."

"And afterwards Selina takes care of me—and the money."

"When I have a chance," Selina added with a sigh.

"To think that my family 'nections should have come to this!" ejaculated Mrs. Higgs; "and you might have been so 'spectable, Joe!"

"Yes. I know all that, Aunt Higgs," replied Joe, easily. "I tried very hard once or twice the respectable dodge, but something always got in the way. And, after all, I don't know that I'm any the worse. Since my marriage, Selina has managed me, you see.'"

"That's your duty, marm," said Mrs. Higgs, looking up at her.

Selina Webber crossed her rusty gloves together, and held her head a little higher, to give emphasis to her reply.

"I does my duty by him, Mrs. Higgs. I shouldn't have left a good home and carawan for him, if I hadn't made up my mind to that."

"I suppose we shall see Mr. Neal?" asked Joe.

"He will be back presently," said Carry; "are you pressed for time?"

"Oh! no—we think of spending the evening with you, for once—if," he added, hesitating, "we're not much in the way."

"I'm very glad to think you have remembered us, Joe."

"Thankee for saying so," Joe replied; "and we're not in the way of the guv'nor here?"

Mr. Galbraith did not reply this time. He continued to sit and stare at the intruders; to feel bewildered by that long, thin woman, with the detestable bonnet.

Carry responded.

"You're in no one's way, when I say that you are welcome," she answered, with a meaning glance at her father-in-law; "we will have the wife's relations to-night for a change."

She laughed a little spasmodically, for she was hurt at Mr. Galbraith's silence; but Joe took her answer for a good joke, and her brother indulged in a little falsetto laugh that curdled every drop of blood in Mr. Galbraith's body. They settled down for the evening then; Carry produced a half-bottle of sherry and a bottle of brandy from the cellaret, her entire stock of alcoholic compounds; and Selina took off her bonnet, and, at the suggestion of her husband, who was full of observation that evening, "smoothed her hair a bit."

It was an odd assemblage in that drawing-room, and would have startled stronger minds than Mr. Galbraith's. But Carry was used to Joe; she pitied his position and moral weakness, and had in her time helped him against the stern father who had turned him out of doors. Between Joe and Carry had ever been no small affection—amidst the bustle of a life which had known much temptation, and been lowered to its dregs by poverty and drink, Joe bore Carry ever in kind remembrance. What little good there was in him, or what attribute of a higher nature there was left to him, was Carry's doing, and after a fashion he was grateful for it. Joe would have shared his one glass of gin with his

wife—for his was not a selfish disposition—but he would have given it all to Carry, had she asked for it, no matter his intensity of thirst. Can we prove more completely than this that there was some good in Joe? Four out of the five occupants of that little room speedily forgot the incongruous elements of the company, for they were members of one family, with a hope or two in common. Mrs. Higgs, naturally of a loquacious turn, launched herself into the subject, and talked volumes of good advice to Joe—recommending patience, industry, and sobriety, and trying, with her usual rapidity of utterance, to picture the good result that would ensue in consequence. Joe nodded his head complacently, and agreed with everything. He was aware that he had been a rogue and a vagabond all his life—that was right enough!—that he had resisted the hardness of his father by improper ways, and gone wrong all the more for the attempt to keep him straight—that he would have broken the hearts of parents made of stuff less durable—it was all true, he did not care to utter one excuse for it. As for keeping steady now, why, the horsemanship would do that for him—he wasn't going to risk *his* life for anybody! Aunt

Higgs couldn't give it him worse than he deserved; meanwhile let him make free with Neal Galbraith's brandy, for it was good stuff—he hadn't to pay for it, and the Circus did not want him that night.

Joe thoroughly enjoyed himself, and when Carry, anxious to make him comfortable in every respect, answered "No" to his hope that tobacco-smoke was not objected to, Joe was happy with his short clay-pipe, whence were presently emitted the most villanous fumes.

Mr. Galbraith took offence at all this, very unwisely. He did not like the even tenor of his way disturbed, and even for that once could not put up with it complacently. He feigned to be absorbed in his plans, but fidgeted idly with his pencil; he refused to come to the fire, or make one of the social circle, as kindly suggested by Joe; he glanced askance at them now and then, and thought that it would have been more proper for Mrs. Higgs to intimate the lateness of the hour, than sit there chattering about the Webber family; and he wondered how much brandy would be left for him—and it was bought for him, and kept expressly for him when his spirits were low—if that fellow they called Joe kept tilting it into his glass at that rate!

The last thought also perplexed Mrs. Webber, who knew Joe's foible. She wished Joe to be presentable to the last, and not leave an ugly retrospect in Fife Street; but Joe was full of anecdote, and that rendered stimulant necessary, and Carry and he laughed a great deal at the times when they were boy and girl together.

In the midst of this, Neal Galbraith came home, and burst into a fit of coughing as he intruded heedlessly into his smoke-filled drawing-room. He had entered with his latch-key, and ascended the stairs full of thought concerning his cold-blast scheme—he and Pike had gone further away than ever from a good result that night!—and the sudden change of scene first bewildered and then choked him.

He recovered his composure in a minute or two, and after a struggle with his breath. Through the smoky atmosphere he recognized the sallow face of Joe, the tall form of Joe's Investment, Mrs. Higgs, and his wife, the latter looking into his face a little nervously. That Neal was very glad to come upon his relations in this fashion, and to find the drunkard at his fireside, taking the lead in conversation, is scarcely natural to expect;

but he was not aggrieved, and he felt already that this was part of his bargain when he married Carry. A thing not to be helped at times, and at which he had no right to complain; he had tact enough to make the best of it, and to sink, with graceful readiness, into the host.

"This is an agreeable surprise," he even ventured to say, as he shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Webber. "I hope that you have been doing well since we met last?"

"Pretty well," said Joe, and he launched into the subject of his rise in life with a volubility and a thickness of utterance that very speedily betrayed where the brandy had gone. Neal listened, after a glance and a nod towards his father, and in due course congratulated Joe on his better prospects, and at Joe's kind invitation even mixed himself some cold brandy and water to drink Joe's health with.

"You're looking a bit worried like, sir," said the giantess, after a sip at her sherry. "I hope business is going on well?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Businesses must be a dreffful worry," she continued; "not to mention housekeeping—for to

live in such style as this must cost a sight of money—two pound a week, perhaps?"

As one of the family, Selina Webber waited for her answer; she saw no reason to keep anything back herself, and she was a woman who expected confidence in return. But Joe dropped in here and diverted the conversation.

"The old gal's right enough—you're not looking quite the thing, Neal. You're paler than you used to be. I s'pose you and Carry jog on together all right?"

"Yes," said Neal.

"Carry used to be a devil of a temper," said Joe, gravely shaking his head at his sister. "I could manage her sometimes, nobody else. But then I got over her with giving her her own way —which is a wrinkle for you, young sir."

Joe's wife laughed at this, and Joe laughed also, evidently conscious of having said a good thing. He looked across the room to see if Mr. Galbraith senior were laughing, and then, disgusted with the stolid glare in Mr. Galbraith's eye, he turned his back upon him. Joe's dignity had been a trifle outraged by the want of sociability evinced by Mr. Galbraith, and that last slight hurt Joe's feelings.

"And there'll be the worry of a family presently, perhaps," whispered the giantess to Carry. "When's that likely to be, my dear?"

"Hush!" said Carry, blushing; "not for months yet. I don't know—I'm not sure. I haven't said anything to Neal. Pray don't!"

Mrs. Higgs did not hear this flying interchange of whispered words—she had been watchful of her nephew's actions during the last hour, and was anxious that he should go before he disgraced the family. She had been watchful of Mr. Galbraith, senior, also, and had become at last mindful of his uneasiness. But Joe was not disposed to attend to Mrs. Higgs's hints; he had found a friend, he said—he and Neal had always been the best of friends, and no men esteemed each other more than they did. He hoped Neal, whenever he was travelling in the neighbourhood of Toppin's Circus, would drop in and see him jump through hoops; he would be always glad to shake Neal by the hand, and make him welcome in every way in his power. The circus would be at Woolwich to-morrow, and if Neal would like any orders, why, he had only to say so.

Neal would be busy to-morrow, and therefore

was compelled to decline Joe's kindness. The brandy was out of the bottle now, and Mrs. Webber was putting on her bonnet. It had been a pleasant evening, marred a little by Joe's weakness. Carry was sorry for that, and wished that she had put out less brandy; but Joe did not come often, and she had done her best to make him welcome. She was a little ashamed of him when he stood up at last, and swayed unsteadily, but she watched jealously for any evidence of Neal being ashamed of *her* brother!

"I should have spent a jollier evening had you turned up earlier," said Joe, by way of concluding remark; "but I'm glad to have seen you at last, and looking so well, too! Upon my soul, I never saw you looking better, Neal! Good-bye, old fellow, and God bless you! You'll take care of Carry, won't you? She's a good sort! Till I speculated in Selina—Sally's her right name, you know—I hadn't a woman in the world to care for me but Carry—you'd scarce-ly credit it!"

"It's very late, Joe," remarked the lady in whom he had speculated.

"All right, my love—I'm ready. Good night, aunt—I shall lay to heart all your good advice—I

never was a man who kicked at my advisers—not I! And good night to you, old Ironchops," he said, verging suddenly on the personal, as he faced Neal's father; "considering our relationship, you might have been a trifle more polite, without busting yourself over it!"

"Joe!—Joe!" reprimanded Carry, seizing him by his arm, and leading him from the room.

The giantess and Mrs. Higgs followed, leaving Neal and his father together. Neal drew a chair to the fireside, and sat down before it, with his hands clasped, and his dark eyes staring at the flame.

He was deep in thought, when his father touched him on the shoulder.

"I would not let this trouble me, Neal."

"I can't help it."

Carry came back for the clay pipe which Joe had left upon the table, and had insisted upon being fetched for him. She stood for an instant aghast at the door, listening to those words, then snatched the pipe from the table, and went out of the room. Neal had not observed her, but Mr. Galbraith had seen her enter and depart, and had held his peace until she had closed the door again.

"You should have thought of this before—but you were hasty, and you never asked for my advice."

"What are you talking about?" said Neal, looking up.

"About these vulgar people com—com—coming here in droves, and drinking all the brandy!"

"I was not thinking of them," replied Neal; "they are not often intruders here, and it is not merciful to turn our backs upon our poor relations. I was thinking of our plan."

"What of it?"

"I am weary of it, and yet I cannot break away from it," said Neal; "night and day ever in my thoughts, aging and bewildering me—robbing me of time, money, and sleep, and advancing no nearer to success. I should have taken warning long ago!"

"But we are getting on. We were never closer to the goal, Neal. I—I shall be able presently to see it still more plainly," he said exultantly; "men of genius like ourselves must not give up—I never gave up an idea when I was young!"

"Better for you and me if you had, father."

"Don't speak of that time—we may retrieve all

yet. Why, this is a grand discovery—I really believe if that—that blackguard and his wife had not come to-night, I should have seen it all, from beginning to end, like a book."

Carry had entered the room again, unobserved this time. Neal was still bending forwards, looking at the fire, with his father standing by him. They were still regretting the visit of her friends to that house, and resenting it as an intrusion on their gentility, thought Carry. And Neal, her husband, could quietly sit there, and let his wife's family be thus vituperated. Joe had not shone brilliantly that evening—Joe *was* a blackguard, perhaps, although she had never had the heart to think so badly of him—but it was not Mr. Galbraith's place to resent her brother's coming in so harsh a manner. Her brother through it all, and one to be defended at all hazards.

"What blackguard are you speaking about, Mr. Galbraith?" Carry suddenly demanded.

Mr. Galbraith jumped a little at the question, but he had been irritated all the evening, and Carry's tone of voice irritated him more.

"That man who calls himself your brother—he —he shouldn't have come here!"

"He has been unfortunate!" cried Carry; "bad counsellors, want of moral strength, need for kindly help, when want of help was ruin to him, have brought him low enough; but I must not have him spoken ill of yet. It is not your place, and I will not bear it!"

"Patience!—silence!" said Neal, aroused now from his reverie.

"And you to take his coming as a trouble!" cried Carry, still vehemently; "he who has not seen you since our marriage, or begged one favour of you!"

"I have not said a word," answered Neal; "you are not just."

"Oh! I am always in the wrong," said Carry; "you will always side with your father against me. Never one word in my defence, but always prepared to enact the champion for him, and side with him against me. What right have you to complain?" turning to Mr. Galbraith again; "because my brother comes here—have I ever said a word against you being an intruder in my home? You are my husband's father, and I respected you till now—but you abuse your place in this house, and I will not endure it!"

"God bless me!—God bless me!" muttered old Mr. Galbraith twice.

He could not stand against a violent attack—he was never likely to be wholly strong again, and Carry's angry words swept away all his resistance, his querulous complaints. He saw his danger then; the enemy that he was making of his son's wife by his foolish opposition, and he was afraid. He sank into a chair, and cowered from her, as he had cowered from his keeper, when his mind gave way, three or four years since.

"Neal—Neal!" he whimpered, "you'll help me—won't you? You'll not let her go on like this!"

"Carry!" cried Neal, "for shame!"

Carry recoiled at Neal's reproof, and then crimsoned with fresh anger.

"I have no more to say to him," said Carry; "but if he attack my brother's name—insulting me through him—I shall speak!"

"To me, if you will—not to this weak, old man."

"You take his part against your wife—why should I expect justice from you?"

Neal did not answer. He led his father upstairs, adopting his usual specific, and the old gentleman

sat on the edge of the bed and began to whimper.

"What an unhappy marriage this has been, Neal!" he said.

"No—don't say that!"

"She's——"

"Say nothing more," interrupted Neal, "but get into bed. I will come upstairs in ten minutes' time, and see that you are all right."

"I have gone six months back in my brain to-night, boy, and all through her."

"You must understand that I never hear a word of complaint against Carry," said Neal, firmly. "You'll try to love her for my sake—will you not?"

"I don't—dislike her," he whimpered again; "she's very good and kind at times; but she has no consideration for my—my nerves!"

"There, get to bed. We'll say no more about it."

Neal went back into the drawing-room; to find Carry cowering in the chair, which he had vacated, with her hands spread before her face.

"Carry!" he said; but she did not answer him.

He waited a little while, then repeated her name, and still received no answer.

He went on, as though she had replied to him,

but with a deeper, darker look upon his face.

"Once before I have asked you to be gentle with my father, for his son's sake—to ask me to be the mediator, reprover, anything you wish. You will have no mercy on him—or on me. Before we married, I told you that I had set myself the task of protecting that old man—taking care of him in his weakness, as he took care of mine—and I *must* have no interference."

The hands before the face trembled for an instant, but Carry uttered no reply. She was in the right this time—she was sure that she was!—and his reprimand was undeserved.

"You are listening?"

Carry would not answer.

"This is my wish—my will!" asserted Neal; "I say no more concerning it. You are acting like a child now; and this burlesque of womanly dignity offends me."

Carry felt glad of that, and resolved to continue silent in consequence.

No one thought anything of offending her—why should he lay such stress on receiving offence? Was he so greatly her superior in everything, that she at every turn must succumb to him?

He asked if she were sorry for all that had happened that evening—he only wished to hear that she was sorry? But Carry would not answer; and Neal gave up the attempt, and went out of the room—to return suddenly, and lay his hand upon her shoulder.

"Carry, when you tell me with your own lips that you are sorry," he said, sternly, "I shall be glad to hear it. Till then, I am insulted!"

Neal spoke like a lord and master then, and retired with dignity. But he was as foolish and weak as his wife, for he should have guessed that the way to her heart was through his love, and not through his commands.

He had had the opportunity to learn that secret, but he was not a keen observer, we have already said; and latterly he had been busy, and had been balked in schemes for greatness. He did not know it; but he let his own shadow stand in the way of the light which should have radiated round him.

CHAPTER II.

A VIOLENT REMEDY.

IT is an analysis not the most pleasing to trace and track the progress of a disunion between two hearts, but it is an analysis that teaches a great moral, and it proves—unless this hand be too weak for the task it has set itself—how small are the beginnings which harden by opposition to granite.

That is a grand secret, the art of giving way at the right moment; known more often to women than to men, and saving much unhappiness in consequence. It was not known to Carry, for hers was a singular nature, that had been warped by incessant opposition, and had met with but little kindness in its course. It was a nature high-spirited and proud, prone to resistance, but full of love for those who would take her to their hearts. A gentle firmness might have led her right; but a

firmness that stood ever a cloak before the love that prompted it, was likely to do irreparable harm, and this was Neal's firmness after their last quarrel.

Neal had asserted his supremacy, and was waiting—sternly waiting, it appeared—for her contrition. He was not inclined to press for her humility; he left it to her better judgment, and he waited. But day after day passed without Carry asking for his forgiveness, or acknowledging the fault that she had committed, and a coldness—such as will occur under similar circumstances—arose between them, and was hard to set aside. They met at breakfast, at their late dinner sometimes—though it seemed to Carry that he was from home more often than ever now—they went to their room taciturn and grave.

Carry grew tired of silence after awhile, and husband and wife conferred together on domestic matters, dinner questions, and repairs, but evaded all signs of that tenderness which should not have wholly died away before twelve months were passed. Carry remembered Neal's assertion on that night they quarrelled last—until she owned her fault, he was insulted; but she could

not think that Neal was waiting for any formal assertion of her error; she began to think, as weeks went on, and he maintained the same demeanour—what a terrible soul-destroying idea it is!—that he had grown very weary of his marriage, and very tired of her. And Neal, all this while, was yearning for a word or look, and brooding in his turn on her indifference—on that spirit of opposition which preferred a life of separation to a word of regret for the past which had caused it.

They were apart now, this boy and girl, who had taken each other for better, for worse. Every day seemed to separate them more. Carry, when not happy, was full of morbid fancies, and she could fancy now how evident the signs were of Neal's want of love for her—how readily he had tired of her, making no allowance for that excitability which he knew was her great weakness—for she had told him so herself—and setting always above her wishes, his superior knowledge of what was best for both of them. She could see that he was ashamed of his marriage; when they quarrelled, he had said that he was ashamed of her, and he had meant it literally. It was very hard, for Neal

had not married her blindly; he had seen the uncouthness of her home; the awful poverty of her brother's house, whence she had sallied forth to meet him at the altar, a woman trusting to him to make her life bright. Then he had turned away; she had seen it gradually creeping upon him, that distaste for his home and her society; ever recurring was the shallow excuse of an invention that made no progress. She could believe that Neal regretted very bitterly his marriage; he had seen a woman better disciplined and more clever than she, and could regret that boyish folly which had tied him to her. It was the case of all hasty marriages; she had read it a hundred times in books, and she had known it more than once in real life, Shepherd Street way. Her father and mother had warned her of her folly, and she resisted them; Mrs. Higgs had even shaken her head at Neal's infatuation; but she had trusted in herself and Neal, and this was her reward!

Carry grew very jealous again concerning Neal's frequent absences from home, but maintained her grave demeanour, and showed but little sign of her uneasiness. They were not friends at heart, Neal

and she, and she was too proud to complain. To his seeming want of interest in her, she returned but apathy. But she was very jealous, notwithstanding, and Neal was absent more than usual.

Despite his gloomy soliloquies concerning the cold-blast experiments he could not give up his project, which seemed now approaching to an end. Surely there was success but a little distance from him, and he sought Pike's house, and fought for the result with him. It was an excitement, this scheme; it rendered him less prone to dwell upon Carry's stubbornness, that refused to offer peace or ask for it; he was glad, perhaps, to be away from his dull home, under the circumstances; she might be more pleased to see him if he were not so constantly before her; thrown more into companionship with his father, old Mr. Galbraith and Carry might grow better friends.

Carry went out one night to Crow Street again, impelled onwards by that jealousy which we have seen before in her She did not call for her husband at Mr. Pike's, but she watched the house for awhile, stole into the scrap of ground between the house and pavement, and looked over

the window-blind. Yes, there were Mr. Pike, his niece, and Neal sitting together, none of them very busy, a few papers sprinkled about, Neal in high spirits, talking and laughing to Ada Merton as he never did to his wife now. That was Neal's home, not the house in Fife Street. He was happy there, whilst he left her to wait upon the fancies of his mad father. Any excuse to take him there, and keep him away from her—she could see it all plainly enough, and she went back more full of bitterness than ever. Nobody had ever cared for her long—there must be a something in her disposition that repelled people. She wondered if Walter Tressider had discovered that also? He had not come to Fife Street lately!

That very night Neal returned home in better spirits. He was looking brighter, and he came into the room humming a tune. He had started with a new resolve to alter home affairs, but Carry never knew that. The experiments that night had proved much—almost all—that they were striving for; and whether a fortune were made by the discovery, or some trade co-operation swindled the inventors of their gains, it was satisfactory to

think that a few more weeks, perhaps, might show that they had not worked in vain.

Neal came in, and was checked by Carry's sullen face. To his first words she answered without looking up, and when he sat down by her side, she drew her chair away, and made more room for him. Neal turned the key on all his better feelings, and thought of that last quarrel that had never been made up between them. Carry continued her work, and Neal went over to his father's corner, and spoke in a lower tone of the progress he and Pike were making.

That same night—unlucky coincidence—Walter Tressider arrived. It was striking ten when he came into the room.

"Not too late to be welcome, I hope?" he asked.

"No, not quite so late as that," answered Neal.

Neal was glad to see Tressider now; the presence of a friend distracted him, and rendered home more bearable. Carry did not parade to the world her grievances, and it was pleasant to see Carry at her best.

"I have been under the doctor's hands," said Walter; "laid up with a hoarseness, which sticks

to me yet. In defiance of all orders, I have stolen out to-night. I could not stay any longer in those confounded lodgings in Mount Gardens, staring at the medicine-bottles on the mantel-piece. Will you take pity on me for an hour?"

"Willingly."

"And you, sir, will bear with me?" said Tressider.

"You are not much in the way," muttered Mr. Galbraith.

Walter Tressider began a long account of his illness, of the loss it had been to him in a pecuniary sense of the word—of the horrors of indisposition in a dull lodging-house, with no friends near him. He was very lachrymose for a time, but brightened by degrees, seeming to thaw in the friendly warmth of Neal Galbraith's fireside.

Suddenly, at that fireside, there leaped into Carry's heart an old, old, foolish, wicked thought, for ever working no end of new evils. What if she showed to her husband that there were some people not indifferent to her yet, one, at least, over whom, with a little skill, she could exercise her power? By making Neal just a little—only a little—jealous, there might ensue for her a greater amount of attention from her husband, a return of that

husband's love to her from its misdirected channel. Fair manœuvring to rouse a cold-hearted lover, sometimes; but, in a wife, a dangerous game to play, and capable of hideous interpretations. Carry's was not a deep mind, and took its bias from the surface of things. She had read of this scheme in books—it was the plot of novels, the element pervading comedies and farces, in which she had played herself—everyone laughed at the mistakes, and admired the ingenuity of the "situations," why should not Neal, when all was known? She did not give much thought to Walter Tressider's feelings, or think how far her by-play might affect him; and in her heart, perhaps, there was a faint desire for retaliation. She was curious, too—anxious, to see if Neal could be jealous, if it were possible to arouse him from that coldness and stolidity which had rendered her miserable so long.

Carry was not demonstrative, but acted naturally. It was her gift—that representative faculty, that had made her society sought for by young people who were fond of playing at actors. The novelty of the idea pleased her, and perhaps she was scarcely in her right senses that night, for she had been watching Neal in Crow Street.

Carry became suddenly solicitous concerning Tressider's rashness in coming out that night; ventured to scold him for it, made him promise that he would not call at Fife Street again, until he was perfectly recovered; hinted at the anxiety of herself and husband at his long absence from their residence; was afraid that Neal or she had given him offence in some way or other, and he had resented it by keeping away from them.

It is doubtful which evinced the greatest surprise at all this pretty fooling—Walter Tressider or Neal. There was nothing in it, nothing to be alarmed at, or to feel flattered concerning—but it was different from Carry's usual manner, and both stared a little in consequence, Tressider becoming awkward and confused after awhile. Carry did not over-act her part, and so readily deceived both men. They did not perceive the motive at the bottom of all this, only the showy surface, which was intended to mislead. Neal saw that Carry was pleased beyond her wont at Tressider's return, and was glad upon first thoughts to see her brighten up so readily; and Tressider, who had lingered round the flame, dull and miserable, and yet unable to wholly tear himself away, felt his brain

reeling and his heart fluttering. He had been nearly a month absent; he had imagined that they were getting tired of him there, and he had felt assured that it was the better policy to keep away, until the delight of Carry at his reappearance helped to revive in him almost the old romance.

A good-tempered and a good-hearted fellow, this Walter Tressider; one who meant no harm, and would not in cold blood have sought to harm any living thing; who loved to see Carry, and took even a morbid pleasure in thinking that he had lost her for ever; but who would no more have schemed to win her love from Neal, than he would have essayed to take Neal's life. Honourable in his own estimation of what was his duty to his neighbour, but unstable as water, having not the strength to resist temptation, if assailed persistently, and in that phase known best to *him* who studies the idiosyncrasies of the erring.

That first night he gave way, though he would not have owned it to himself. Had Neal taxed him with a thought injurious to his peace, Tressider would have shrunk with horror from the charge, and denied it with all his heart and soul; but Carry's looks reminded him of the time when

they were all in all to each other, and no Galbraith had robbed him of the prize. He believed that he had talked himself out of his folly—he believed it still, though he was restless and feverish that night. He went home thinking of his first love, and of what a fool he had been to seek her out and give her up, assuring her that he was a scamp who could never make a good husband. She took him at his word, though she had loved him very dearly, and this was the end. Surely the end of all folly and delusion had come when he knew that she was married.

After he had gone, Carry, flushed with success, sat down to tremble at the result, to wonder if Neal *had* been jealous, to feign deep fits of thought which would puzzle him by their intensity. Neal was silent after Tressider had gone, but then that was a habit of his now, and she could read no story from his inflexibility.

She must wait. In the future, when his love had re-awakened by these means, she would tell him that it all had been done to keep his heart from straying away, and he would value her all the more for her power, and seek to hold her closer to his breast from that day. It would be a

pleasant story to think of, and a still more pleasant triumph for her. Thinking it over in her room that night, with Neal quietly sleeping by her side, she knew then how she had learned to love Neal, and yet what a blank his firmness, or his unconcern, had made of her life. She knew more than this, but she kept the secret from her husband, who held her at arm's length. In a few months' time —six months at furthest, there would be another link to bind their hearts together, and make love between them far more easy. Had that cruel barrier not have built itself between them, she would have told him of their hope a month ago; now she would wait till they were better friends, and surprise him in the first flush of happiness following their reconciliation. She would spare Neal, too, at the first sign of his uneasiness—his fear that inattention or want of kindness had alienated her affection. But she knew no more of Neal's true character than Neal of hers—or that Neal would have preferred to die, had that indomitable will of his, growing with his growth, and making him very strange and stern, decided that it was better to betray no sign.

Neal was terribly quiescent—she only knew

that. If there were a difference, it was in an extra degree of coldness to herself, and that she could not bear, and must resent. There were evidences of change in his habits, and that might be the dawn for which she prayed.

As Tressider came more frequently again, so Neal stayed at home more constantly, and played the host at Fife Street. If her husband were watchful, nervous, so much the better for the plot, thought this wild wife, who took stage plots as fitting for real life; but she did not think of the watchfulness of others —of Mr. Galbraith, from his corner, taking stock of the *minutiæ* of her frivolity. And, above all, she did not dream of Walter Tressider estimating her jest as earnest; she had faith in bringing Neal to her feet, without luring on to his fate the foolish man with whom she was trifling.

It was a more quiet piece of acting, after the first night; Carry had but to fan the flame, for Walter Tressider was weak enough to betray his interest in all that she did and said. Having no evil in his heart, or thinking that he had not—which was it?—he made no secret of his pleasure in her society—of his interest in her. A more designing man would have deceived witnesses and watchers,

but Tressider betrayed his liking by his very ignorance of how intense that liking was. It was a grand game of cross purposes, in which each was absorbed in his or her hand, and forgot the play of others in the match. The only one judging for others as well as himself was Galbraith the Inventor.

Neal was sitting before the fire one night after Tressider had gone home, in much the same attitude, brooding and stern, as when his father had sown the seeds of the last quarrel between Carry and him—when that father again took his place by his side. Carry had gone to bed; she always went away first now, and Neal, following in due course, found her asleep, or feigning, perhaps, and so life's monotony flowed on.

"Neal," said the old gentleman, in a husky whisper—he had become alive to the danger of speaking in a high key by this time—"aren't you getting very tired of that skipjack coming backwards and forwards here?"

"He's good company," replied Neal, evasively; "he keeps the house alive."

"I never liked the man from the first," said Mr. Galbraith; "he wants solidity. I wouldn't

trust such a man with anything above the value of a sixpence!"

"You are prejudiced against the name."

"Very likely—it is not a lucky one."

"No—it is not."

Neal seemed anxious to dismiss the subject, fearful of what his father might say next. He rose and stamped his feet upon the hearth-rug.

"How cold it is to-night! I think that I shall go upstairs now."

"Wait one moment—I want to talk to you about this man. I want you to tell him plainly, and straightforwardly, not to come again."

"Have you taken so great a dislike to him, then?"

"I detest him!"

"Why, that's not Christianlike!" said Neal, trying to put the matter in a light less sombre; "you must not be so hard upon mankind, father."

"I—I don't think that he comes to see you, or cares so much for your company, as your——"

"Hush!" said Neal, quickly and imperatively; "that's an uglier thought than all the rest—keep it to yourself."

There was something touching in the manly

dignity which Neal set *that* aside ; he would have no suspicion of evil intentions in his friend, for they affected his wife's purity of thought, and degraded himself.

The father succumbed at once; he knew Neal's commands were not to be lightly disregarded, and he felt as though he had done wrong in striving to set things right. More and more the idea began to impress him that he was a meddler and a busy-body, striving for his son's happiness, and, in the effort, placing it at a greater distance from him. It was very hard, but very true, he feared. With his perceptive faculties becoming stronger, he began to see that he was not adding to anyone's happiness by his presence in that house. And yet what was to become of him, and where was he to go ?

Neal went upstairs, and found Carry with her eyes closed. He stood looking at her, long and thoughtfully, as the Venetian Moor might have looked in the first days of his doubts, when he was fighting against them, and believing that he did *not* believe ! Neal had been vexed and tormented; he had not required the expression of his father's fears to disturb him. Carry's new manner, her best spirits for the guest, and the

worst for him; Tressider's growing embarrassment and forgetfulness, were all part and parcel of a grave perplexity which troubled him. Athwart his mind more than once passed the suspicion of the truth, but it brought no consolation. It could not gratify him to see Carry feigning all this interest in Tressider; it looked like a paltry revenge on his firmness, which would not give way until she expressed her sorrow for that past fault. He could not believe in so mean a retaliation, and he saw in Tressider no acting. He needed no prompting from his father, as to the best method of procedure; he was watching intently now, and Walter Tressider's days of visiting were numbered. Still he wished to spare everybody a scene—Neal disliked scenes—and he was not going to show Tressider that he was jealous of him. He judged Tressider more accurately than most people with whom he had come in contact—but then Tressider's character was shallow, and no extra degree of penetration was necessary. Meanwhile, let him make sure of Carry's thoughts, and be gladdened by the knowledge of her faith in him. The time was coming, perhaps, and looking at her that night, sleeping so peacefully, he could believe it.

Galbraith the Inventor was more perplexed than Neal, for he was of a more suspicious nature. Moreover, he had a horror of the name of Tressider, and he had prophesied concerning that new comer, who took his place so complacently in Neal's drawing-room. He sought counsel of Mrs. Higgs, having failed with his son, and next morning, when Carry was absent, he unburthened his sorrows to that faithful servant, and took away her breath by his suspicions.

"It is not that I believe in any harm," said Galbraith; "but I can see that it will lead to much unhappiness. Carry's very young, and vain, and fond of admiration, and Neal can be as hard as iron, and desperately obstinate."

Mrs. Higgs had not recovered her breath yet. She was thinking of the past, bringing to recollection many things connected with it, and seeing by degrees how easily trouble might arise to those "two young things," as she called them.

"What does Tressider want here, night after night?" said Galbraith; "coming in after his stage-ranting, and keeping us up all manner of hours, listening to his twaddle!"

Mr. Galbraith could be very severe, it may be

seen. The sharpness of his tongue had made him many enemies, before the weakness of his head led them to pity and forgive him.

Mrs. Higgs did not say a great deal that morning, but she listened patiently to Mr. Galbraith's communications, and, favoured by the luxury of an attentive listener, Mr. Galbraith grew verbose enough. Carry, on her return, found her aunt and father-in-law in the front parlour, and from their confusion she guessed that they had been speaking of her. Never mind, the dawn was coming now, and all would be explained shortly. Let them think what they liked of her, just now—it did not matter much. She was the heroine of a comedy, that was verging on its fifth act!

Mrs. Higgs went out that afternoon, to brave the frowns of Mr. Webber, in Shepherd Street. But Mr. Webber was not at home, and therefore his frowns were spared her. What she learned of her sister Johannah that might throw a light on Carry's antecedents, and confirm parts of an old story which had been nearly forgotten, we shall see in due course. But she returned pale and agitated to Fife Street, and the next morning, and once more

in Carry's absence, held a slight consultatio war—war to the knife against Walter Tresside with her old master.

That evening, Neal went to Mr. Pike's, an mained there till a late hour. In the interim, Walter Tressider appeared, expressed his re at Neal's absence, remained much longer necessary, dwelling upon an offer that had made him from a country manager, and only to go when Carry, startled by his reluctan withdraw, rose first, and spoke of the probab of Neal being very late that night. Carry begun to see the dangerous nature of her met and to shrink from further experiments. was only waiting now for evidence of N anxiety for her—some sign that he was re jealous!

Walter Tressider departed; Carry and Galbraith sat at opposite ends of the room for remainder of the evening, and then Carry wen bed. Very late, and with the snow upon Neal let himself into the house with the latch- and came into the drawing-room.

"What! still up, father!" he exclaimed.

"I wasn't very sleepy to-night. Any good result with the furnace?"

"Pretty fair—we shall have it now in good time, I think. You must come with me to-morrow."

"Thank you."

"Carry has gone upstairs, I suppose?"

"Long ago."

"Any letters?—anyone been?"

"No letters—Mr. Tressider has called."

"Oh! has he?" said Neal, carelessly; "sorry that I was not at home to meet him. How—long did he stop?"

"An hour—or an hour and a half."

"The devil he did!"

Neal was sorry that he had betrayed his vexation, and hastened to rectify the error. He spoke of the experiments that Mr. Pike and he had worked at all that night—of the new furnace roof which Mr. Pike had had made since their last meeting. For once Galbraith the Inventor betrayed no interest in a scheme so engrossing, although he had been the founder of the idea, in an interval of lucidity. He said, when Neal had finished,

"I did not know till to-day, Neal, that Mr. Tressider and Carry had ever been engaged to each other."

"There was a liking between them once—never an engagement."

"Yes, there was an engagement between them —on the sly."

"Who says so?"

"Mrs. Higgs."

"Mrs. Higgs has blundered, as usual. Good night."

"God bless you, boy!—Good night."

Neal went up to his room somewhat hastily; but on the first landing paused, and thought for a while. Of the cold-blast scheme—or of a colder, keener blast that seemed to have found its way into his heart and home? A movement of his father's below took him upstairs the rest of the way to his bridal chamber.

He looked at the fair face of his wife in the old, thoughtful way, wondering very much. Could she sleep there so peacefully, and have one thought against him?—and yet could she look like that, and yet make no effort to come back for all the love and confidence he yearned to give her? Why,

he was nearer success in life now than in love—he might be able to raise her to independence in a few more weeks, and yet she cared not to hear the news!

She opened her eyes, and looked at him. They were large and bright enough, and showed no sign of having been disturbed from slumber.

"I thought you were asleep," said Neal.

"No—I have not been asleep. I have been thinking."

"About what?"

"Nothing."

Neal asked no further questions; he locked the room door, and dropped into a chair. Carry lay and watched him, feigning not to watch, and noticed how his face shadowed, and what an intensity of thought beset it.

Was he thinking of Addie Merton, of his father's plans, at which he professed to work still, or of her and Tressider? He had watched her sorrowfully a little while ago, believing that she slept—he had been thinking of her! It would all be bright enough now perhaps, if she only had the patience to wait, and not mar her own work!

CHAPTER III.

THE BEST INTENTIONS.

IF Neal had given voice to his doubts at this juncture, Carry might have had reason to congratulate herself on the result of her scheming. But Neal remained silent, retaining ever that stolidity of aspect, which nothing seemed to shake. Carry was nearly at the end of her tether; there was no more to feign; she had played her part through, and the failure of all efforts was inevitable.

She had made one sad discovery, during these attempts to rouse her husband's love—she had found that there was no love to rouse; that Neal had readily forgotten her, and it was the old, old story of a boy's love—a boy's whim—that sought eagerly its object, and let all passion die out with the chase! She should not have trusted to him, or made so desperate a leap—in seeking

to escape an unhappy home, she had but fled to another whose desolateness was more intense. Neal was one-and-twenty now; he had reached man's estate, and with his manly thoughts had died out the boy's affection. If she had married Walter Tressider, it would have been so different a life—if she had only waited and had faith in him! If—and then Carry would pause, and dash the tears from her eyes, and set about the household duties of her little home. She had no right to think of Walter Tressider—he was far back in her retrospects; and, after all, he was not like her hard, clever husband. Neal never gave way like Walter Tressider—oh! if he would, but for once, before the breach widened between them, and they settled down in life wholly indifferent to each other, as her father and mother had settled down years ago!

Still there was one faint chance yet—when their child was born, it might make a great change, and turn Neal's thoughts towards her. She prayed it might, and the hope for which she prayed was more honest than the melo-dramatic scheming in which she had hitherto indulged.

Early in the afternoon following the day men-

tioned in our last chapter, Carry was surprised by a visitor. Addie Merton had ventured, for the first time in life, to invade the precincts of Fife Street.

It was an embarrassed meeting for a few moments on Carry's side; she had not anticipated that guest; she had been thinking unfairly of her lately, envying her Neal's visits, and Neal's society; she was not quite sure that she had not betrayed her jealousy to Miss Merton on that memorable night when she humiliated Neal by calling for him.

Mr. Galbraith, senior, was departing for his usual walk when Miss Merton arrived, but he stayed a few moments conversing with her, asking after Mr. Pike's health, and treating her with a grace and urbanity that Carry thought had never been shown to any one related to *her*. Carry's mind was always making comparisons and finding the result against her.

When Mr. Galbraith had gone, Miss Merton sat down by Carry's side and looked very steadily into her face. Carry could but notice then what a pale, earnest face it was.

"Mrs. Galbraith," she said suddenly, "I have

offended you in some way—will you tell me how?"

Carry was not accustomed to these leading questions—they took her off her guard, confused, and vexed her. They might be evidences of an outspoken nature, but they sounded to Carry rude and defiant.

"You have not offended me, Miss Merton," answered Carry, "pray assure yourself that that is a mistake."

"I think that we should have been better friends by this time," continued Addie; "my dear uncle is attached to your husband—your husband comes very often to our house."

"Very often," ejaculated Carry.

"They are like brothers," Addie went on without heeding the interruption, "and are, as you know, likely to be partners."

"Miss Merton, I know nothing," said Carry, hardening rather than softening at this appeal; "my husband does not condescend to impart any information relative to his business pursuits; he reserves it for his friends."

Carry Galbraith never could disguise her feelings in excited moments; she betrayed at once, in that

interview, all that her own pride, her esteem for Neal, should have kept back. Fortunately, to betray her troubles to Addie Merton was to set a friend at her side, and awaken a new interest.

"Carry—forgive me calling you by that name, but Mr. Galbraith always speaks of you as Carry to us—" said Addie, "you are not happy. You are jealous of Neal's visits to our house—I see that."

"You see that I am jealous?" cried Carry, swelling with indignation; "how mistaken you are!"

"Well, I hope that I am," said Addie, in reply, "for I want you to come more often—to come with Mr. Galbraith, and be interested with him—with all of us—in the progress making in the cold-blast scheme. Oh! Carry, they are so near success, and success will make so great a difference to all of us!"

"Will it?" responded Carry, listlessly.

"And if I have offended you, pray tell me how, and let me do my best to make amends," urged Addie. "Sometimes I speak out more hastily than I should, but it is in the impulse of the moment, and no one regrets it afterwards more bitterly than I. Was there anything said to

wound you on that night we met each-other first?"

"You are mistaken—I am not offended with you," persisted Carry; "but I am not interested in experiments, and it is a long way to Crow Street."

"If I were married," said Addie, reflectively, "I think anything that interested my husband would be a source of interest to me."

"Have you paid me this early visit in order to lecture me on the proprieties, Miss Merton?" Carry asked, satirically.

"No—don't think that," said Miss Merton, quickly. "Receive me, as I come hither, in good faith."

Carry was touched for an instant by this young woman's earnestness, but she could not understand her. Between their natures were opposing elements, which were distorting mediums to look through.

"Well!" said Carry, thoughtfully.

"I will confess to you more plainly why I have intruded here—I have told you partly my reasons, and you have assured me that I am wrong. I don't think that you would tell me an untruth."

Carry winced, coloured, felt her heart rebel again. No, she should never like this young

woman—with her obtrusive goodness. She was too plain-spoken for her—she was not "her sort!"

"My dear uncle, then," Addie Merton proceeded to explain, "is solicitous concerning Neal."

"*Neal!*—oh!"

"We call him Neal at Crow Street now," Addie hastened to say; "he has been always Neal to my uncle, who loves him very much, and I have fallen into the way too, just as if I were his sister. You do not mind that?"

"Oh! no," said Carry, with a little toss of her head; "go on."

"My uncle, then—both of us, for that matter—have seen how greatly Neal has altered, what a grave man he has become, and how, in every way, he has not improved for the better. My uncle has taxed him with the change, and he replies that we are both mistaken, both full of fancies, and that he is the same man, with nothing on his mind except the wear and tear of thought occasioned by his studies. But somehow it is an unhappy-looking face!"

"He is not happy, perhaps," answered Carry, coldly. "I do not think it likely that he ever will be——"

Till I die, she was going to add, but checked herself. This young inquisitor must not know too much.

"Why not?—what is to render him unhappy?" asked Addie.

"I don't know. You must ask him rather than me."

"No—you ought to know," urged Addie; "you are his wife, from whom he has no secrets, whom he loves, and in whom he confides. And I come to you from my dear, thoughtful uncle—oh! you do not know how good he is!—not to pry into your secrets, but to assure you that in any way you may rely upon our help. That if it be money-troubles —and marriage makes a difference in housekeeping —my uncle says he need not grieve for that; and if it be troubles of the mind or heart, we might be able to act as mediators. Do not think we are officious in thus intermeddling, but we claim a right as friends."

"I have said that he has not spoken of his trouble, to me. Neal has always been a grave man —I think that, perhaps, you have been a little over-zealous in this case."

"You see nothing to fear?"

"Nothing."

"Then perhaps we are wrong in this too?" said Addie. "You should know best. Only—only Mr. Pike has been very anxious, and has made me the same. I have fancied that lately there has been a difference in Neal."

Carry set her white teeth together again—this repetition of her husband's Christian name was not pleasant to hear.

"Time will make a change in him, perhaps," said Carry, coldly.

"I hope so. When success has rewarded the efforts of him and my uncle, I have hope of brighter times. Perhaps it *is* this search for an idea that has altered him—for my uncle has grown very thoughtful too, but then it is a different kind of thought to your husband's."

Addie hesitated at last to continue. Carry maintained an equable demeanour, and showed no warmth of interest in a topic that should have been "all in all" to her. Was it possible, thought Addie, that the secret lay in the want of sympathy between man and wife—and that they were discontented with each other? Had it been a rash marriage, of which each had repented?

Frank as she was, Addie could not intrude upon that subject. Her shrewd common sense warned her that it was dangerous ground to encroach upon, and that it was not her place, or in her power, to interfere. Between husband and wife she could not be peacemaker—a girl of seventeen, respecting the former and knowing but little of the latter. Had she and Carry been great friends, she might have essayed the task, ever impracticable; but with that cold defiant face confronting her, she felt that her duties to her neighbour were ended in that house.

Addie had been a little vain of her powers of mediation until then. Most people had admired her, and learned to love her; she was a favourite with her friends, her poorer neighbours, with all who understood her; but here was a young woman whom she felt she could have loved for the very qualities opposed to her own, holding herself aloof, and evidencing dislike. The young wife was not a happy woman —it was certain—and there probably lay the secret of Neal's morbidity. It was Addie's suspicion at least, but she could not utter a word concerning it.

She made one more effort towards friendship.

"You will not keep away from Crow Street I hope," she urged; "if you don't like me now," she added with a naiveté that might have raised a smile at another time, "you will when we know each other better. It seems very odd for your husband and my uncle to respect each other and you and I to be strangers."

"It is odd," murmured Carry.

"He is so noble and earnest a man—with a mind so far beyond his years—your husband!" said Addie, quite enthusiastically.

"He should be flattered by your kind opinion of him."

"It is my uncle's as well as mine."

"It is satisfactory to think that you all agree so well together," said Carry, with cuttting sarcasm.

Addie turned quickly at this reply, full of a new thought.

"Perhaps you don't like him to be so often from home? Can we come here when the furnace is not wanted? Can——"

"No, no" interrupted Carry; "that would not suit Mr. Galbraith, I think. But—I am detaining you, perhaps, from *other* missions of kindness. Your time must be valuable."

Addie rose with Carry. It had been a terrible failure this interview, and Addie had had hope in it, after her conference with her uncle that morning. She had believed in Carry accepting their help—if it were needed—and in all working together to one common end. She had been met with coldness, and a something very like disdain; and there had crossed her mind, and settled thereon, a belief in the unhappiness of the wife as well as the husband.

They parted, and Addie went slowly and thoughtfully down Fife Street, to meet Walter Tressider lounging at the street corner, haggard and pale.

"Mr. Tressider!" she exclaimed.

"Miss Merton," he replied, stammering and colouring, "how strange that I should meet you here! Have you been to Mrs. Galbraith's?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hope? That is, I saw her last night, and no doubt she's well enough," he added a little incoherently.

"You live in the neighbourhood?" asked Addie.

He proceeded to walk by her side, in a listless, slouching style, that gave him a disreputable appearance, well dressed as he was.

"Yes, just here," he answered vaguely; "and for a little while. I think of going abroad—to Australia—with a little working company of players."

"Abroad?" repeated Addie, in a lower tone.

"I—I don't like England much—there's no one that I care for—that is, that cares for me; and I'm better out of England."

"Always unsettled, Mr. Tressider."

"I don't see my way to settling down," he said; "I'm a regular fool, you know, Miss Merton. I always have been."

"Your profession does not tend to settle you, I think," said Addie.

"Ah! you are a dissenter—you have all the dissenter's abhorrence for the player."

"I should have liked to hear—that is, my uncle would have been glad to hear—that you had been successful in some other calling."

"I tried one calling, and it did not answer. I was cut out for this. Haven't I said so more than once, when I used to call in at Crow Street and horrify poor Pike?"

"It dont't seem right—it can't be right," said this prim little Methodist, "a life of acting—a life with the—"

"Don't run them down, Miss Merton," he added quickly; "there are some good men and women in their midst, and you cannot know much about them. I don't say," he added recklessly, "that I'm a good man. God knows that I should like to be, but I can't!"

"You are in temptation," said Addie, with a brightened colour; "night after night it faces you—and you so weak a man!"

"So weak a man!" he repeated sadly; "ah! that's true enough. If I had only your moral strength, Miss Merton—but then women have more of that material than we have; and fate's been ever against me too."

"Don't talk of fate," said Addie, quite warmly; "that's the coward's excuse for all the evil he creates."

"I am a coward," said Tressider, warmly; "I never owned myself a brave man. I creep on my knees towards the danger, and then sit staring at it, with no strength to move away. You would pity me very much if you knew all my life—why, I would give anything for that courage of my uncle which took him out of the world."

"Hush! hush!" cried Addie, "this is wicked.

Whether true or assumed, wicked in the extreme, and not excusable even, as the stage rant by which you profit. Mr. Tressider, you have not altered for the better."

"No," with a short laugh, "that's true enough!"

Addie increased her pace, as though she would outwalk him, and shake him from her by those means. He accepted the hint, muttered an indistinct "good morning," and lounged back towards Fife Street, where he seemed to hover like a bird of ill omen, and where he was seen by more eyes than Addie Merton's.

CHAPTER IV.

WALTER TRESSIDER FORGETS HIMSELF.

MEANWHILE Carry Galbraith, after the departure of her unlooked-for visitor, had sat down to the table to brood upon her wrongs. She had taken a false view of the motives which had brought Miss Merton to her house, and a first impression lasted some time with Carry.

She could see it all now; it was clear enough. That girl of seventeen, with her mock modesty and her cunning, had stolen there to learn her secrets. She had wished to face her rival and judge for herself if Neal's—that woman called him Neal!—account of her were true enough. Or Neal might have been dispirited lately, and she had come to see the cause. At all events, and under any circumstances, she had not come as her friend; Neal might even have sent her,

and—to this height had her jealous fancies worked themselves at last—it was very likely that people had begun to talk of Neal's visits to Crow Street, and to wonder why the wife was always left behind. She felt that she hated this Miss Merton, —whose every word and gesture had been studied before she came into that house—and that her coming was an intrusion and an insult. She was inclined to judge everything wrongly in that bitter time. Neal had deserted her. He had no confidence; he told her nothing; he set his father before her in everything, and he confessed his hopes and fears to Addie Merton, not to his neglected wife.

She was brooding there—how long she had sat at that table clutching her pretty chin, she never knew—when Mrs. Higgs's voice aroused her. She had not heard her aunt enter the room, but there she was, standing before her, looking down at her with a seared motherly face.

"Oh! Carry, I wants a sight of talk with you. May I?"

She asked it somewhat nervously, and her manner still further aroused Carry. It was so different to her sharp, crisp way.

"Well, aunt," said Carry, leaning back in her chair, "talk on. What is the matter?"

"That's what I want to know myself, and you can tell me, if you will."

"Can't you guess?" was the hard answer.

"I might guess wrong—I hope I should."

"I wouldn't guess—I wouldn't think anything about it," said Carry hastily; "no good can come by paining me with questions, or by seeking to satisfy a paltry curiosity."

"You're not happy, gal."

"Why, that's easily seen," replied Carry; "you might have found that out months ago."

"I did," was the quick answer.

"What makes me unhappy, I can't tell you very well. Marriage is not the blissful state I deemed it—there, take that for your answer, aunt, and let me think again."

"Thinking don't seem to do you good," said Mrs. Higgs, "and striving to get over all these thoughts would, or I'm no woman."

"You can't tell how I have striven—but with no one to help me, I give way."

"May I help?"

"You!" cried Carry, scornfully.

She had been led to say more than she had intended, and was vexed at her own candour. But this woman was her aunt, whom she knew loved her—was, perhaps, the only one in the world who cared one tittle for her—not the spy upon her secrets, as Addie Merton was. Yet this old woman touched the wrong key-note, as was natural enough, and woke up the usual discord.

"I think that I can help you, Carry," said Mrs. Higgs; "for I think that you are giving way, and being set with wicked thoughts. You married my young master without being sure that you could love him like a wife, and now married and settled down like, you won't try."

"You are as wrong as all the rest of them, I find," cried Carry; "you don't know how I have tried."

"You keep your husband worried by that play-acting fellow, who is always here."

"That worry him!" cried Carry; "what does Neal care!"

"I'm sure——"

"You have not heard Neal express one regret—have you?"

"He's too proud for that, more's the pity."

"Or too indifferent. Neal does not mind who comes to this house, or talks to me."

"I don't think *you* do," added Mrs. Higgs, dropping into her old sharp tone by degrees; "and I take the liberty to say how wrong it is. You're my niece, and I've a pride in you—and a stake in this marriage, which might be a happy one, if you were like anybody else. You're going into danger, Carry."

"No—I'm not."

"That man 'Essider, and you, were sweethearts once," she said, "and he comes here again, and you can't forget him. I don't think that he has any right to come, or you to 'courage him; it must unsettle you. For *you* know, Carry, that he's thinking of you still."

"No one ever thinks of me!"

"What is he always here for?—what does he hang about the end of the street, staring up like an idiot at this house for? I'd give him a good shaking, if I was a man—the mean-spirited, bad-hearted wretch!"

"He watches this house!—Walter Tressider?"

"Yes, it's gone as far as that, and yet it isn't wrong! Oh! Carry, this will lead to ruin, body

and soul, and I too weak to stay you! I've knowed women like yourself led away by vanity until they didn't see the wrong from right, and didn't care. This must be stopped, as I'm a woman, and there's a Lord in heaven! I won't have this go on any more. I'll speak to Neal!"

"Speak to him!" said Carry, defiantly, "and tell him to hold me down, and keep me away from Tressider. He'll only laugh—he don't care for my love going away from him. I am his wife, of whom he is very tired!"

"You are wrong."

"You are an ignorant woman, guessing little of the thoughts at my heart or at his. Wait patiently, and take my word for it that there *is* no fear."

"There is!—oh! there is!' cried Mrs. Higgs, wringing her hands; "and you so stubborn, like you've allers been. I feared your temper when you married Neal—and now my fears are coming true!"

"You'll drive me mad between the gang of you!" half shrieked Carry; "I will listen to no more of this! I will lock myself in away from you!"

Carry sprang up and rushed away. She went to her own room, closing the door heavily behind her,

and turning the key in the lock. She had striven hard to be misjudged, but the reality was very poignant. The crisis of her life was approaching, and she began to see through the mists that life's mistake. Carry could not rest in her room, however—she was more excited and unsettled there than she had been downstairs; and she struggled from the bed on which she had thrown herself, dashed her face into cold water, dried her eyes, and then returned to the drawing-room.

At the door of the room she paused; there were voices in the passage on the lower flight; the sharp voice of Mrs. Higgs—sharper and more resonant than ever—and the voice of him who had been the cause of much anxiety and misconception.

"You had better not come here when Mr. Galbraith's out," said Mrs. Higgs; "I think you'd better wait till night, young man."

"I have been waiting now too long, and my business is of importance," Carry heard Walter Tressider reply; "be good enough to take up my message, and leave its answer to Mrs. Galbraith—if she says 'No,' I will withdraw."

"I shall not take up any message of yourn—there!"

Mrs. Higgs folded her arms, and looked defiantly at the visitor; it was evident that he was cowed by her demeanour.

"As you will," he replied; "I will come in the evening, then."

"*Stay!*"

Carry had flown downstairs, and was standing in the hall, flushed and excited. She had resolved on her course of action also, and it was time to end this comedy. She had been wrong herself, and must make reparation. She saw that now!

"You must not forbid my husband's friends this house, without his consent or mine," she said, angrily, to Mrs. Higgs.

"Mrs. Higgs may hear all that I have to say, if she pleases," said Tressider.

"No," said Carry; "you are to be trusted. This way."

She went upstairs to the drawing-room, and Walter Tressider followed her, entering without closing the door—an instinctive delicacy, for which Carry was grateful—and standing a few paces therefrom, hat in hand.

He stood there a sad picture enough—one could have guessed his character, and seen its reigning

weakness by his vacillating face, his nervous shuffle with his feet.

"Say what you have to say, in as few words as possible, Mr. Tressider. I have been troubled to-day, and I have something to tell you, when you have finished."

"Perhaps it would have been as well for me to have gone away saying nothing," he murmured; "but I had not the courage; and," with a sudden impulsiveness that startled Carry, "I did wish to see you, just once more!"

"You are going away—whither?"

"I am going to Australia. I made up my mind late last night, and closed with an offer which I had refused last week. I leave the day after to-morrow."

"Well?" said Carry, almost impatiently.

"I am a very miserable wretch—you are aware of it!" said Walter; "step by step in life some misfortune has met me, hard to resist. I don't complain now—it's my luck!"

"You have been fortunate in finding a place in the ranks of a profession already overcrowded."

"Ah! such luck as that I was not thinking of," he answered carelessly; "I must have been some-

thing, I suppose. I would prefer to remain in England, and work my way in England, but I feel that I ought not to stop here any longer. Oh! Mrs. Galbraith—Carry!" he cried, impetuously, "you should have been my wife long ago, and not have blasted every hope I had!"

"Don't say any more!" said Carry, with her hands spread out, as though by that action she hurled his words back; "but let me speak!"

"You gave me up—you took me at my word when I was mad, and knew not what I said," he cried; "but I don't complain—I have not come hither to reproach you, or act the stage hero in this house. Forgive me if I have given way—it is the last time, the very last that we shall ever meet!"

"You should not have come to talk like this to me," said Carry, coldly, but with her hand upon her upheaved bosom.

"I did not wish to steal away like a thief—forgive me again, but I do not even think that it is a crime to love you, when I wish no harm to Neal, and only happiness to him and you. Upon my soul, that is what I wish—nothing more! Will you believe me?"

"Yes."

"I thought that I could come hither, and make Neal my friend, profiting by his energy and industry; I looked for happiness ahead of me, and I fancied that I could see you, day after day, and feel content. The knowledge that you were Neal's wife, was to be a stronger power to keep me down, than the consciousness that I had loved you first of all, and we had promised once to be married to each other! But I was a fool!—every day you reminded me of my loss, of the Carry Webber who had trusted in me, and latterly I dared to think——"

"No matter what," interrupted Carry, eagerly; "your thoughts misled you, and you have no right to tell me what they were. Have you any further confession to make to a married woman, sir?"

Walter Tressider hung down his head.

"Nothing more—I wish you to bid me good-bye—to tell Neal everything that I have said to you, and how I think it best for all of us that I should take myself away. That's all."

"You have been afraid that I should love you," said Carry, scornfully—"I see that by your manner."

"No, I dared not think that!" he cried, colouring and stammering; "for my own sake I go away—for no one else's."

"Walter Tressider," said Carry, advancing to him, and holding out her hands, "I have to ask you to forgive me."

"Forgive you for what?" he said, moving back a step, and reluctant to imply by any action of his own that he had anything to pardon.

Carry let her hands fall to her side, and looked down at the worn carpet. Very beautiful and humble she appeared in that hour, and yet invested with a wifely dignity, that chilled this stage-struck fellow.

"You must forgive me," she said; "but I have been unhappy lately—I have missed my husband's love and confidence by some strange chance, and I was anxious by any means—at any cost—to bring it back. I did not love you—perhaps I have never loved you—but he knew that you had been my lover, and I was wicked enough to hope to win him back by jealousy. I never thought of you, or how easy it might be to revive that feeble passion which you had had for me; I did not reckon on the few days since your last disappointment—I

thought of nothing but my husband. I was a woman with but one hope of happiness, and I could not let it escape me, even at the cost of sacrificing *you*. I have been very wrong, but you must not—you shall not!—go away with the idea that I was ever false in thought to Neal. I am glad that you have come—that I have found the courage to tell you this—to confess my meanness, and to ask you to forgive me!"

"You are forgiven, Mrs. Galbraith."

Walter Tressider was mortified by this avowal, and yet he had not spoken as though he had had the faintest dream of her old love for him being existent still. But it was a strange confession; he saw that he had been made the dupe, and it seemed hard that she, of all the world, should have had the heart to trifle with him.

"I was a child—I had but a child's strength of mind—and my wretchedness was driving me mad then, as it is now," said Carry. "Oh! why did you ever come back here again?—it would have been more honourable to stay away!"

Carry dropped into a chair, and gave way to a passionate abandonment of tears. She was truly miserable, and the clouds seemed closing her in.

She made one hurried gesture that Tressider should go away, but he did not see it, and her heavy sobs unmanned him. He was weak enough to love her still, and the sight of her suffering was to take away the little self-command of which he had ever had to boast.

"Carry—dear Carry!" he cried, running towards her, "I know that I have been wrong to come here, but you led me on—you own it. I am all that is dishonourable; but you were unhappy, and I could not find the cause."

"Away, sir!" cried Carry, springing to her feet again—"I will not hear this! I hate you for a knave!—leave the house!"

"No, no—not hate me!"

It was a piteous appeal, but Carry did not retract her words.

"Not to go away for ever with that sentence!—not to part like this!"

"No—not to part like this!" said a stern voice behind them, and Neal Galbraith, with the devil in his face, came into the room, followed by his father.

"Gal—Galbraith!" ejaculated Tressider.

"I have been an unwilling listener for the last

two minutes, Mr. Tressider," said Neal, speaking very low, but with an intensity of bitterness; "but when one's honour is at stake, we forget the refinements of society. Have you finished this very dramatic interview with Mrs. Galbraith?"

"Yes, sir."

Tressider was recovering himself slowly, though the blushes had not burned out of his face yet.

"Then leave my house."

Neal pointed to the door, but Tressider hesitated.

"You will let me explain, Neal?"

"Sir, I have heard your explanation," replied Neal; "there is nothing you can add to it to soften my feelings, or alter my opinion of your conduct. You have brought your stagey manners into common life, and they have dazzled my wife for awhile, and insulted me."

"But——"

"Sir, will you go?"

Neal stood before him with his hands clenched, and his dark eyes kindling more and more. Tressider, watchful of results, went back a step, but held himself on guard.

"Neal, you misjudge me," he said. "If you had heard all——"

"Sir, I have heard quite enough. Are you going?"

"I have no resource but to go."

"You have heard my wife's verdict upon you, now hear mine. She hates you for a knave, *she says!*—I damn you for a scoundrel!"

Neal flung forward his right arm, but it was caught by his wife's hands, as Tressider recoiled.

"Well stopped, madam," said Neal, ironically. "The act-drop should have fallen here, had we all been on the stage. We are a trifle too excited just at present to appreciate the workings of our drama!"

"Go, sir," said Carry, to Tressider.

The actor went away at her request, still slowly and regretfully. Carry sank down in the chair she had quitted; Mr. Galbraith wrung his hands as he leaned against the mantel-piece; Neal, stern and dark, stood there a sentinel.

"My dear boy!" Mr. Galbraith began, when Neal checked him with a sudden gesture.

"Not just now—leave us, please."

"If you will only wait a bit!"

"Leave us," harshly reiterated Neal, and the father followed the suit led by Walter Tressider.

Husband and wife were left alone together.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIFTH ACT.

THE crisis had arrived at last—that crisis for which Carry had planned and deceived! It *was* the last act, but would it end like comedy or tragedy? All her past hopes were realized; Neal was jealous, and suspected her, but was this shadow that appalled her the event for which she had bargained in her rash frivolity?

Neal waited some time after his father had retired from the room before he spoke. For the world, Carry could not have broken that awful stillness first.

"Mrs. Galbraith," he said, at last, and his first words made her start as she sat there, "you have deceived me!"

Until that day he had never called her by his own name, and it smote upon her heart like a knell. It was with an effort that she answered:

"No—not deceived."

"I am not going to ask you for a defence," he said, more coldly; "it matters little to me what line of argument is used by a woman without one fair excuse for her duplicity."

"I have done no wrong—God knows that all I did was for the best!" said Carry.

"Chance brings me home to-day, when I am unexpected, to find that man here," said Neal; "chance, or a Providence that willed my shame," he added, bitterly, "brought me hither a witness to his dastard conduct, and to your madness. You ask that fellow to forgive you—forgive you loving him still, I suppose——"

"No, no!"

"Will you let me speak?" asked Neal, so fiercely, that she shrank back with a stifled cry, "or will you take the part of the injured heroine, and let me listen. No, keep still," he said, detecting her impulse to respond, and checking it. "I have not had much to say to you lately, and I think the time has come to show that I am not a puppet in your hands. You have fancied me a boy-husband, to be treated like a boy. I have come of age, remember!"

Carry waited for an opportunity to speak—to confess all to him, owning her weakness even, and asking pardon for it.

"I told you just now that I had been deceived. It need not have surprised you, knowing how you had duped me all my life."

"It is false!"

"I was not aware till yesterday that you and Tressider had been engaged to be married—my own father is my informant, not my wife!"

"Tressider told you—on that night he went away; he——"

"Told me nothing save lies, that were intended to mislead."

"I thought that you knew all?"

"I do not believe it."

"*Neal!*" cried Carry, looking intently into his face, and half rising from her chair.

"I repeat that I do not believe it," said Neal —"and that there is no excuse for your deception, which I could take to heart, and say it brought me comfort. For ever after this—I doubt you!"

"Cruel!"

"Knowing that you never loved me—that you took me for a husband to escape a home a trifle

more miserable than this—that you lay down by my side to think of Tressider, and mourn for him—that you loved him yesterday—that his presence here has been a solace to you—that with every day you have turned from me, and striven, by your pride and falsity, to break me down—I doubt you!"

"I do not deserve your doubts—I will not have them!"

"In everything you say and do, I shall watch for the hidden motive lurking in the background. My God!—this my wife, and I but one-and-twenty!"

It was a wild cry of rage and baffled love; but it chilled Carry to the heart. She detected the despair in its accents, but failed to perceive the grief therein. He wished her dead!—yes, he wished her dead now—he meant nothing else but that!

"Tell me what you believe of me!" she demanded. "Do you think that I am guilty—guilty of the Wrong?"

"If I had had that thought, you would have followed your fine lover, and I should not have wasted words upon you in reproach! For guilty

women—there are the Streets, not the homes of honest men!"

"If you have not thought so badly of me—why not let me speak?"

"I do not wish to hear any defence—I have already said that there is no defence to which I could pin my faith. You have trifled with your danger—leading on that fool, tempting him and yourself, by raking over the ashes of a morbid passion! You are no woman fit for me!"

"I will go, then—I will not shadow your life by my obtrusiveness. I shall be as happy away from you as with you!"

"It is more than possible."

"If I have been wrong, Neal, it was to lead you right, for you were turning against me. I thought that in your jealousy for Tressider would come back your old love!"

She had confessed this at last; but Neal's face did not brighten at the revelation. It was full of shadow still, and Carry never hoped to see the light again there. But she waited—oh! how anxiously!—for his next words.

"And do you want me to believe this?"

"I ask you."

"That is your excuse," he said scornfully; "why, woman, it degrades you more! It shows the moral baseness to which your petty enmity would have reduced you, sacrificing your good name out of spite! It's a lie!—you loved him!"

"On my soul—no!"

"It's as false as you are!" cried Neal; "he hangs about the house day after day; he has written to you since your marriage, and you hide that letter from me; he was here this morning in my absence. And all this to rouse my jealousy!—the excuse is worthy of you!"

"Sir, you are unmerciful!" said Carry, full of resentment at Neal's stubborn attitude; "I will not beg for forgiveness from you any more!"

"As you begged for Tressider's!"

"You are not free from blame—you have neglected and humiliated me in every way—you love that girl in Crow Street, and it is the hope of winning her that makes you wish me dead!"

"I wished but your happiness and mine—and yours first," said Neal; "but I regret this marriage now, with all my heart!"

"Enough!" pleaded Carry.

"Enough!" echoed Neal; and then he dropped

into a chair by the fireside, and spoke no more that day. How the day passed he never knew; no one brought up the tea, and no one asked for it; he had a dreamy consciousness of his father stealing into the room, looking wistfully towards him, and going out again; he remembered Carry sitting at the table, as silent as himself, and then the rustle of her dress on the stairs ascending. He sat there all the night—the long, cold night, before the empty grate, from which the brightness had died out, as surely as his heart's had done; and it was only when the late morning came with its greyness to scare him, that he remembered where he was.

Then he woke as from a trance, and went downstairs, and out of the house—to business!

CHAPTER VI.

MR. GALBRAITH, SENIOR, MAKES ANOTHER DISCOVERY.

WE shall not attempt to follow closely the misery of the young wife's thoughts. Upon her plans revealed, the mine exploded, and the Lares and Penates piecemeal, it is not our intention to dwell. There are no words to convey fully the utter blankness which seemed before Carry, when she rose up that morning, and knew that Neal had not come near her all that night. It was isolation in its completeness, and she saw but little hope from that day.

She went downstairs early, but the room was empty. Neal had left with the first dawn, hugging his injuries closer to him, for that warmth denied him by the world. His was a nature retentive of wrong, and unforgiving; he had confessed as much once, and she had lightly made a jest of

it. But jesting days were over now, and there was desert-land beyond. How would it end?—if she could only see how it would end!

Mrs. Higgs brought in the breakfast-tray, saying nothing, but looking a great deal. She had the instinctive sense of keeping quiet, of guessing all, and judging that silence was the wiser policy. She went out sighing heavily, and wishing that everybody had but been regulated by her advice some time ago. Carry sat with the breakfast untouched before her, until Mr. Galbraith crept into the room, with that scared expression of countenance which had not left him since last night. He did not ask where Neal was, but sat down at the breakfast-table, and felt his ponderous head all over, as though he were not quite certain that he had come down with the right one. Assured at last, he poured his own coffee out, then Carry's—both habits foreign to his—and pushed Carry's over to her side. But she did not notice the action, till he called attention to it by touching her arm.

"I don't care for breakfast," she said listlessly.

"I'd try a bit," he suggested, with more kindness in his tones than she had ever heard before.

She was surprised, but it was a far-off kind of wonderment, that seemed to belong to a time anterior to this.

"No, thank you."

She wanted to sit still, and think of all Neal's angry words. Of what a torrent they consisted, bearing all away with it—her defence, the story of her love and jealousy, everything that she had hoped to cling to, and found but straws swept away by the swirl of the water. What a mad woman she had been! If she could but live one month over again, she and Neal and Tressider, she would not fear to die at the end thereof. Then there rang in her ears those awful words of Neal's, and they presaged the future.

"For ever after this, I doubt you. In everything you say and do, I shall watch for the hidden motive lurking in the background!"

And yet there might be hope educed from those other words which rang out regretfully at last.

"I wished but your happiness and mine, and yours first." But then the awful wish that followed—submerging everything!

So Carry thought and pondered as to her wisest

course in life, with the untasted breakfast at her elbow, and Mr. Galbraith watching her.

It was a long while afterwards that Mr. Galbraith startled her by saying,

"I don't see that any good can come from thinking like that, Carry; it would kill me!"

The newness, the kindness of his tones, were very startling again, but they were not of the present hour yet to Carry.

"It will all come right, now that you have had the matter out—and it was going wrong fast."

"Was it?" said Carry.

"He will come round—he was a lad who always came round after the fit was over. Passionate, awfully passionate before my *illness*, but sorry enough afterwards, if he were in the wrong. Not that he has been in the wrong this time—which is awkward rather."

"Don't speak of it!"

"He came in five minutes after me, and only heard what would have puzzled the devil to make out. I was listening long before."

"What of it?" Carry asked quickly.

"He only heard you asking for forgiveness, and that fool of a Tressider raving, and you crying;

and then Tressider accusing you of having led him on—what a capital memory I have got now!"

"And you heard——"

"I heard you wither the rascal up before that," he said, chuckling; "and all his flimsy rodomontade along with him. You don't know—how glad—I am—that you never liked that fellow!"

"Why do you not accuse me like your son?" said Carry; "*you* have been never just to me."

It was a child's fretfulness, and Mr. Galbraith saw it—dim-sighted as had been his perceptive faculties of late.

"I have been thinking of Neal, and the trouble in wait for him—a greater trouble than this one, which I know now could have never come to pass."

"A woman without a hope can drift on to any trouble."

"Ay! God help her! But there is hope for you, my daughter."

It was the first time that he had ever called her by that name.

"I don't know," she murmured; "I don't see any."

"How is that?"

"You are kind now, but if you had not set him against me quite so often," said Carry; "you have stood ever between us, and he has fought your battles rather than mine. Of late, you have been the spy upon me, turning informer against a past of which I am not ashamed, but which, if you had left alone, would have been so much the better. You have helped on my misery, sir, but I do not complain now—I will never complain again, if I can help it."

"Good gracious!"

Mr. Galbraith held his head between his hands again—this was putting him in a new light, and it dazzled him. He thought the subject over for a long time, and then said, when Carry had forgotten it—

"Do you think—really—that you would have been happier without me here?"

"Yes."

"And Neal, too?"

"Yes."

"Good gracious!" he repeated, for the second time.

This was a discovery more startling than the cold-blast, with something of the same nature about it.

Happier both of them without him!—happier with him out of their way; making up their quarrels after their own fashion, and aggravated but by mediation. He thought over all the little differences that he had had with Carry; his memory was strengthening very rapidly; he could go back step by step for many months, and note the past incidents thereof, standing out like crags and headlands in the way.

Happier without him! Well, it was likely now that he came to reflect upon the matter, he thought with a little quivering sigh; he had never made anybody very happy, and he had been the cause of more than one dispute between this child couple. It had been Neal's duty to take care of him, and Neal had not shrunk from it; but had Neal been happy with him—as happy, he meant, as he would have been without him?

The old man's head sank more and more as he brooded upon this; he had no wish to distract Carry's thoughts now from the old channel; there were new ideas pouring in upon him. A painful, heart-depressing army of ideas to fall upon the old and world-worn; to remind them that they are in the way, and marring the enjoyment

of those younger and more full of life—we pray we may be spared it in our dotage!

"Oh! dear!" the old gentleman sighed, after a time; but no response came, not even the echo of his own heart-wail.

Perhaps it would be as well if he were to go away, and leave husband and wife to mind their own concerns. He had a little income of his own, and it would be sufficient for him, he being a man of few requirements. Besides, he need not go very far—he should not like to die alone, he thought—but rent some little room in the neighbourhood, where Neal could come and see him, if he wished. Perhaps it was best—perhaps it was the only way to make his son content. Whilst he was there Carry was dissatisfied, and Carry dissatisfied, rendered Neal so. He saw all that—he was convinced of that!

There was something of the weaker estate into which he had fallen in the sudden leap from his chair. There was a new idea before him, and he must follow it to the end—he must begin at once, and not let anything stop him. He wasn't wanted there—he could believe already that he had been the cause of every trouble which had fallen on that

house! And he was a Galbraith, and the Galbraiths had always been too proud to remain where they were not wanted. What had he been doing so long there, but sitting in people's way, and getting them to hate him as an incumbrance?

He went out of the room without Carry perceiving him, fetched his hat and went downstairs. At Mrs. Higgs's parlour-door he knocked.

"May I come in, please?"

Assuredly he might, and in walked the little man, with his hat on his large head, his cane in his hand, and his frock coat buttoned to the chin decisively. He looked altogether so decisive, that Mrs. Higgs scented fresh danger on the instant.

"Well, and what's the matter with you, too?" she asked not too courteously; "is there anything fresh to *gally* us?"

"Nothing of much consequence, Mrs. Higgs—but I want you to recommend a quiet lodging for me, in a respectable house, not too—too far away," he added with a gulp.

"What for?"

"I'm going to have a room of my own, Mrs. Higgs. It ought to have been done long ago—it ought indeed!"

"You!" said Mrs. Higgs, disparagingly.

"I—I shan't mind it much after the first few days—it's so easy to get used to anything, and I don't see much of Neal just now. Do you know if there be anything suitable at that corner place? —there has been a bill in the window this month."

"You'd better take a walk and think it over."

"Oh! my mind's made up, Mrs. Higgs," said the old gentleman very firmly; "it isn't as if I was a child, or likely to be persuaded into anything. I'll go—I'll find a place—and I'll send for my portfolio and my night-shirt in the course of an hour or two."

Mrs. Higgs reflected. She knew that it was useless to attempt to disturb the intentions of Mr. Galbraith, and that she must let him have his way. She was a sensible woman, who had seen some time ago that Carry resented the constant presence of her father-in-law, and that their opposite natures had clashed too frequently. She was not certain but that Mr. Galbraith's resolution was a wise one, and better for all parties.

"Well, I'll go with you, sir."

"Eh?—where?"

"I'll help you find a place, if you don't min 'meaning yourself to my 'oximity," said Mrs. Higg dashing into hard words as she became excited a beheading them remorsciessly; "you and I t gether won't have long to look about us. But don't see why Master Neal and Carry should move instead of you. You can't be *trapesi* about alone."

"They won't think of leaving me—they would like to hurt my feelings. I should wish it all do before Neal comes back this afternoon."

"Then we'll take a place for you and me, a I'll leave 'em the whole house, and, with Carry her wits' end where to find the things, sh brighten up, and so will *he!*"

"No, no," said the alarmed father, "you must go on like that. They have trouble enough with your gambols. Find some kind, motherly pers just to see to me a bit; when we're more settl all of us, we can arrange this, and I should li you to take care of me very much then. For" here his voice broke somewhat, till he mastered —"I could not bear all the old faces gone away

Mrs. Higgs put her knuckles into her eyes, a then jumped up.

"Come on then, sir—let us see about a room for a week. You won't mind a room for a week, until I straighten here a bit?"

"Mind, indeed!"

Mrs. Higgs put on her bonnet, without a glance at herself in the glass, and then master and servant went out together. They walked up Fife Street side by side, Mr. Galbraith very erect, and with his cane keeping military time on the pavement.

"That's the place I mean," said Mr. Galbraith, pointing to No. 1, Fife Street, in the window of which a torn card hung sideways, and informed the general public that there was an apartment for a single man within.

"He's a railway porter there, and will be coming in at all hours of the night—and his wife's a drab!"

"What's that?" asked Mr. Galbraith.

"A slovenly sort of woman, fal-lal like of a Sunday, but all the week—good Lord!"

"Indeed, now!"

Mr. Galbraith was perfectly satisfied with Mrs. Higgs's graphic description, but he passed the house reluctantly, nevertheless.

"I could have seen Neal go to business every morning from that window—couldn't I?"

"You'd have flopped out of it, leaning, and staring!" said Mrs. Higgs. "We'll try the street across the road."

"I never liked that street!"

But he crossed the road with Mrs. Higgs, looking back at No. 1, Fife Street, in his progress, and being nearly run over by a butcher's cart, the driver as reckless of human life as are all drivers of butchers' carts, by some strange dispensation.

"Lor' save us, do mind, sir!" said Mrs. Higgs, dragging him on the pavement by the collar. "At your time of life, you shouldn't look behind you!"

They went up the opposite street, where Neal had made love to Carry, one dark night, a little while ago. Mr. Galbraith began to sigh very heavily.

"If you've altered your mind, sir, let's go back," said Mrs. Higgs; "nobody will be a bit the wiser for us walking here."

"I've not altered my mind—I'm like a rock, ma'am!"

"That's well, then. Very likely it is for the

best, Mr. Galbraith; and though they 'spects you very much, both on 'em, yet it isn't always quite the thing to be in the way. I daresay, now, your son Neal wouldn't have cared much for Webber always in that first-floor front—or even my sister Johannah, which is a milder 'racter."

"No, no—I daresay not. But I was such a selfish brute, and didn't think about it."

An apartment to let—a bill in the window announcing the fact—a two-storied house, with clean white curtains, and a door-step significant of industry and hearth-stone.

Mrs. Higgs knocked, was pleased with the landlady's appearance, casually introduced the single gentleman, and asked to see the room. The single gentleman only wanted one large bed-room—for a week on trial—with room for a table in the corner. The table in the corner seemed to suggest some sinister designs on the part of the incoming lodger, for the proprietress said, with an eye bent on him angularly:

"He's not a portrait-taking man, and going to smell the house out, is he?"

"The table is for my plans, madam."

"What do you want pans for?"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! the woman's deaf, Mrs. Higgs—and I can't bear deaf people!"

Mr. Galbraith ran away down the street, and Mrs. Higgs had to apologize, and run after him. She found Mr. Galbraith very excited, upon coming up with him. He was offended; he objected to Mrs. Higgs foisting deaf women upon him; if there were one set of people more objectionable than another, it was deaf people. Mrs. Higgs should have known better!

"I like people with all their faculties about them, Mrs. Higgs!" said Mr. Galbraith, with becoming dignity.

He was some time recovering from the slight that had been put upon him, and was scarcely composed enough to give his opinion on the first apartment which he condescended to inspect. It was a large room, but he did not think that it would suit. He objected to the locality, and he wanted to know if a boy in the street with an iron hoop, yelling out a national apostrophe to "Susannah"—a favourite melody of that period—was always there, beating time with his hoop stick; and that question satisfactorily replied to, he thought, as there was no short cut to Shad Thames that way, he wouldn't

trouble the landlady to say that he was coming.

Mrs. Higgs and Mr. Galbraith departed in quest of a room once more; but the more rooms they looked at, the more dissatisfied was Mr. Galbraith, and the more frivolous became his objections. He could not see anybody passing on this side of the way, and the street bent round too suddenly and cut off the landscape, and there wasn't room at that window for his table, and he could not hear anyone knocking at that height—could not tell Neal's knock from any one else's. He mystified the landladies who had not the clue to the one thread of thought running through these wild objections; they were anxious—terribly anxious some of them—to let their rooms, but there was the consolation of thinking that at least they had been spared much worry of mind on account of a mad lodger.

Mrs. Higgs and Mr. Galbraith were becoming very tired. Mr. Galbraith could not walk at the rapid rate in which Mrs. Higgs invariably indulged, and it tired the old servant to trudge on at the master's pace. She was agile, and always dashed through business.

"I don't know where to go," said Mrs. Higgs, wearily.

"Suppose—we work our way back into Fife Street, and see what that number one's like, Mrs. Higgs?"

"If I didn't think as much," said she in reply; "oh! dear, to think you are so artful!"

"There's nothing seems to suit me about here, you know."

"Ah! *I* know!" was the sententious answer.

They trudged their way back to Fife Street, Mrs. Higgs indulging in soliloquies about her back. She never remembered being so tired in her life. The wife of the railway porter was aroused from her domestic duties by Mrs. Higgs, with whom good mornings were affectionately exchanged.

"This gentleman thinks of having a room this side of the way, or near here somewhere, Mrs. Stripe; can we see your 'partment?"

"To be sure."

It was the first-floor front-room—smaller than might have been anticipated, and full of corners, owing to the builder's frantic desire to get three rooms on a floor—cramped, low-ceilinged, ill-furnished, and smelling fustily.

"Ah! that's something like a room!" said Mr. Galbraith, even to the amazement of the landlady, who, however, found breath to reply,

"Yes, sir, it's a noble room!"

"And look here—here's a view, Mrs. Higgs!—why, I can see all down your street, and the scraper on the step, and the St. George's Road, too, with all the omnibuses!—why, how very cheerful to be sure!"

Mrs. Stripe inwardly resolved upon adding an extra sixpence to the weekly rent.

"It'll be handy for me to run across and see to you, until we've settled matters, certainly," said Mrs. Higgs; "and when you're dull, you can always come to us."

"Yes—yes, that I can."

The old gentleman took off his hat, set his cane in the corner, and proceeded to draw off his gloves.

"You won't stop here now?"

"Yes I shall—I'm tired—I shall take possession, and Mrs. Stripe will be good enough to cook me a chop, and to find a boy to bring the few things of mine from over the way. I don't think that I need trouble you any more, Mrs. Higgs, to-

day. You can tell *them* where I am, and when they're so dis—posed—I shall—be very—glad—to—to—to see them!"

He flourished his handkerchief a little in the air before burying his face in it; and Mrs. Higgs shortly afterwards left him, wondering if it were for the best, and what Neal would think of it.

Mr. Galbraith recovered his equanimity before Mrs. Higgs had retired, and congratulated himself on the novelty of his position. He wondered also what Neal would say when he reached home, and whether the son would be very glad that the sire had gone away. It was a proper spirit that he had evinced, and he was somewhat proud of it.

His heart was very full, though, and when Mrs. Stripe brought in the chop, he sat before it, turned it over and over in his plate, stuck it on the points of his steel fork, and regarded it with scientific eyes; finally left it untouched, and crept back to the window.

He took his place there, with his back to Mrs. Higgs's house, and his face towards the St. George's Road. When Neal was at home, he should reverse

positions—it was a very handy window! So this old man sat watching at his post, till the day died out, and the night came stealing into Fife Street.

CHAPTER VII.

"A HOUSE DIVIDED."

NEAL GALBRAITH, turning slowly the corner of Fife Street that winter's night, met with a surprise. He was coming on moodily from business, with his hands behind him, and his eyes bent downwards, when it met him. He had altered lately—but he had altered very much within the last four-and-twenty hours; the quick step, and the bold, resolute face, looking forwards and fearing nothing in advance, were gone—the youth of the man had been dying out rapidly enough; but it seemed from his face that age had fallen on him now in earnest. He came along a man of forty, tall and unbent yet by advancing years, but full of care, that robbed him of that brightness which make men of two-score years look young still.

A vigorous tapping at the window of a house

opposite, beginning in gentle fashion, and increasing in force as he passed by, startled him, but did not make him turn his head.

"Some fool, full of animal life—or drunk, perhaps—wishing to raise a laugh at my expense," thought Neal.

"Hi!—hi!—*Neal!*"

Neal stopped then, and looked with dismay at the open window of No. 1, Fife Street, and at some one gesticulating therefrom in the shadowy background.

His father's voice!—his father at that window!—what had happened during his absence to place him there?

Neal crossed the road, and looked up.

"I'm so glad you have heard me, boy!" said Mr. Galbraith, from the open window; "do you mind coming upstairs a moment? I want to speak to you!"

Neal, bewildered still, knocked at the door. Was it all a dream, full of the incongruities pertaining unto dreams—and when had it begun? Oh! if before last night, when he had found his wife with Tressider, how much to thank God for in waking!

Mrs. Stripe opened the door.

"I'm glad you've heard him, sir—I thought he'd smash the windows," said the landlady; "and I do hope, sir, he's not so very mad!"

"What!"

"We've allers called him the mad gentleman about here, and thought he'd something to do with the big-place at the back—turned out incurable, perhaps."

"You should think about your own affairs," said Neal, before mounting the stairs, three at a time.

"Well—I'm sure!"

Mrs. Stripe slammed the street door, and went into her parlour. Neal Galbraith entered the room on the first-floor, and found his father in the dark there, sitting by the window, faintly illumined by the street lamp below.

"What is the meaning of this?" Neal asked, walking towards his father, taking his seat by his side, and placing his fingers on his wrist.

"I'll tell you presently—I want to talk to you about Carry first—about Tressider and her."

"Not to night, please."

"But——"

"But if you will please to explain this extra-

ordinary action on your part, I shall be grateful."

"I—I haven't gone mad again, Neal!" said the father, drawing his hand somewhat petulantly from his son's; "my pulse is as calm as your own, for that matter! This is my room—I've taken it for good. I'm going to live here. It's the wisest step I have ever made in my life."

"Are you tired of us?" asked Neal; "haven't you been happy with us?"

"I've been as happy as the days were long!" exclaimed Mr. Galbraith, forgetting all past differences; "you've been always kind to me; and she's tried pretty well, for a young woman. But I wasn't adding to the peace of either of you—though I didn't know it till this—morning!"

"Then *she* told you?"

"Yes."

"Well!—well!"

It sounded like a wail over some faint hope of better times, that he had been fostering that day—a mournful cadence, which took away still further hopes with it.

"She is quick—wondrously quick—at retaliation!" he murmured, after a while; "she knows where to strike!"

"You mustn't blame her for this, Neal," urged the old man. "Don't, there's a good boy, have another *row* about me! I've gone away to stop all rows—and she didn't ask me to go, exactly."

"You have been driven away, sir!—I can see that."

"No—this is my own thought. It's all of my own accord, and I was making her miserable, and then it got round to you. She said I—I had always stood between you, and that I had been a spy and an informer against her. Oh! dear, it was not right to say so much as that—and perhaps she did not mean it!"

Neal clenched his hands in the darkness, and the face of the troubled man would have scared the father had the light fallen on it.

"She does not mean all she says, I believe," was the deep response, after another long pause. "Put on your hat."

"For what?"

"You must come back with me. I'll not have you stop here."

"It's only—it's only for a week, and then Mrs. Higgs is coming."

"How well and quickly it has all been arranged!"

said Neal, scoffingly; "but I think that I have a voice in the matter, and that it will be heard. Come with me."

"No, Neal—never."

The old man put his arms behind him, and twined them through the back of the chair. For the first time he resisted his son's mandate, and faced him with an obduracy equal to his own.

"I ask you as a favour?"

"I can't grant it—I would rather stop here and die, than go back there again. Upon my soul, I would!"

Neal saw the futility of urging his father just then—the danger of asserting his will in the face of that dogged opposition. For once in his life, he saw what was best, and paused.

"I will come back late to-night, and ask you. Will you think seriously of this again?"

"Yes—yes, I will."

The old gentleman was glad to defer further argument.

"I'll think of it," he continued; "but it's a very cheerful room this, although it's rather dark just now, the landlady being backward with the lights. I can see all down Fife Street, Neal—and when

you chance to look out of your window, I can nod at you. Besides, I'm not sulking with anybody, and you can come across when you like—and Carry, too—and I'll have tea with you every other Sunday—there! Why, it's all as comfortable as possible!"

Neal listened, or feigned to listen, drumming idly with his fingers on the table. When his father had finished, he rose.

"I shall be here again presently—think over my wishes as well as you can," he said.

"Are you going now?"

"Yes."

He went out of the room, and downstairs to the passage.

"Take up lights directly, please," he called, after tapping at the landlady's door—then he let himself out of the house, and crossed the road towards his home.

He walked along at that slow rate of progression from which his father had aroused him, but the face was darker still with shadow, or the night was blacker than Fife Street had ever known it. He held his hands behind him, and they gripped each other hard; the compression of his lips told that

he was suffering. Outside his door, he paused for awhile, thinking; then he drew the latch-key from his pocket, and let himself into the house.

"Again!" he muttered.

He closed the door behind him, and went upstairs. Mrs. Higgs opened the parlour door, and called to him.

"Mr. Neal—I——"

"I know. I have heard all," he answered, without stopping or looking behind him. Mrs. Higgs listened at her door, till she heard him enter the drawing-room, then she withdrew into her little parlour with a sigh.

"This is—very 'pressing to the spirits," she said, as she took up her needlework.

Neal entered the drawing-room, where the tea was set for him, and the candles lighted. In the easy chair by the fire—his father's chair, and in his father's place!—sat Carry, her hand supporting her head, her face averted from him. No movement as he came into the room—no look towards him—a statue cold as his heart!

He had not expected a welcome home that night—he had not wished it, perhaps—but the immobility of the figure by the fire wounded him for all that.

And he did not know—he never knew—that she was only waiting for one word of kindness to become his wife again.

He sat down at the table, the man aggrieved—the man in the right till then, perhaps—and pushed the tea-tray back to make room for his elbow. Then he sat there for a while, as silent as his wife. Carry was the first to break upon a stillness that finally became more painful than last night's storm.

"Have you had tea?"

"I do not want any."

Carry mustered courage to speak again; she was not so strong as yesternight. God help her!—not so strong in mind or body!

"Your father——"

Neal broke in abruptly here. He checked her more by the darkling look upon his face than by any harshness or anger in his tones. His voice was deep, firm, and unutterably sad, speaking of a mind made up to meet the worst, and of no hope in him for anything better or brighter from that day. If he had spoken to her with last night's vehemence, she could have stood her ground. For that she had been prepared, not for this new hard

demeanour, which rendered him impenetrable. She could not speak of her regrets in the face of his invulnerability.

"I ask your silence concerning my father," he said; "you have thought fit to affright him from this house—wreaking a woman's malice on one who has always wished you well. You could not have struck more surely, or taken a better means to wound me—we will call this day successful!"

"I did not ask him to go—I did not care whether he remained or not. It was all one to me."

"*I* cared," said Neal, with emphasis.

"More for him than for me—always!" retorted Carry; "you cannot lay your hand upon your heart and say it would not have pleased you more to find him here, and learn that I was gone away for ever?"

Neal did not reply, and Carry, irritated by his silence, cried—

"Answer that!"

"It would have been better, perhaps, for us all," came the hollow response at last.

Carry sank back in her chair as though a pistol shot had struck her, and lay there like a dead

woman, to whom, by a miracle, an awful sense of mental suffering remained. She did not cry; she did not feel an impulse to break forth into her old passions; she was very calm and cold; she could note the pattern into which the fire had shaped itself, the position of the fire-irons, the red ashes falling beneath the grate, the kettle hissing at her, a scrap of ribbon in the fender, and Mrs. Higgs's black cat reaching over, and trying to touch it with her paw. To note all this, and yet to feel that the very commonplaces of home were part and parcel of her suffering, rendering her desolation more acute!

Yes, it was desolation! She knew that now; she accepted it as final. This man whom she had chosen for her husband—this man only one-and-twenty years of age—was unforgiving and relentless. She had been wrong, but he would not offer pardon—for the one fault of her life he neither asked nor wished for atonement. He was proud of his own misery!

"Yes, it would have been better, Neal," she answered as bitterly as himself.

The answer came long afterwards, but Neal accepted it. He had not forgotten his last words,

but had brooded upon them, and thought of all that might have been had she been true to him, until Carry broke the silence.

"I know it," said Neal in response—"I see that now."

"Our marriage was a mistake," murmured Carry.

"A life's mistake! God forgive our rashness, for He did not intend us for each other!"

Carry winced again, but her outward demeanour betrayed no emotion. Like her husband, she had ossified, she thought.

"I accept the result—it is natural," continued Neal; "I do not look from this night for any happiness or peace. We are eternally apart."

"Be it so—it is your wish."

"I say that it is the natural result," corrected Neal; "what my wishes are, surely cannot affect my wife. They lie as apart from hers, as our characters—both diverge, and no semblance of affection between us can alter that."

"You think the worst of me?"

"No."

"You mistrust me, then—Neal?"

"Yes."

"You are in doubt—you, my husband!—whether I am innocent!"

"You are guilty in thought—and I cannot forgive it. In all my life, I will *not* forgive that."

"I deny it!"

"I will be silent," he continued, not heeding her denial, "but I will take no consolation from one doubt. I will be silent, for this house's peace—but I will forget not, nor forgive."

"I will go, then."

"You are free to act," said Neal; "I will not raise one finger to thwart you. Go where your heart prompts you, if you will—I shall be no more unhappy than I am!"

"You will be happier!" cried Carry, recovering from her syncope, "for you will be free!"

"Free!" echoed Neal, bitterly. The truth that was wailed forth in that one word was misinterpreted. But a life crossed by the storm is on a sea of misgivings, and judges, how often, for the worst!

"If you were a rich man, Neal," said Carry, vehemently, "you would propose a separation. Seeing no happiness ahead, it would be your—wish?" she asked.

"I am not a rich man. I am in no mood for

discussion of abstract questions, with a woman who has no sense of self-respect."

"I ask you—give me my answer!"

Neal looked at her for the first time that evening. She had half risen, and with her hands clutching the sides of the chair, was looking at him with an intensity of eagerness. He might have seen the truth then in his turn, but his heart was heavy, and he was groping in the dark still. He could not spare her one word in the bitter lesson he was teaching her.

"If I were rich—I would suggest a separation. It would be better for me; if I found no happiness, there might, at least, by a strong effort, come peace."

"And happiness too—with another whom you might love. Add that!"

"I will add nothing more. We are bound together for—worse, and there's an end of it!"

"No—the end is coming!"

Neal looked at her again—he did not understand her, and there was nothing new in her looks to set him right.

For a while—a long while this time—silence was maintained between them. The fire died out, and

the clock downstairs struck more than once before Neal rose.

"I am going across the street, to induce my father to return here," said Neal.

"Very well."

Carry looked towards him as he went out of the room, but he did not turn his head. Full of his wounded pride, he walked away sorrowfully, but sternly; and, as he went out of the house, and the street door closed, Carry, with a wild light in her eyes, sprang to her feet.

"It would be better for him!" she said; "he owns it! He is tired of me! he never loved me!—he will never forget or forgive! Cruel!—cruel!—cruel!"

She paced the room once or twice, and then, taking a candlestick from the table, went upstairs, looking flushed and angry. In her room, she paused again, and pressed her hands to her temples, after her father-in-law's fashion, pushing back her fair hair behind her ears.

"I stand in his way—he hates me—I will go!"

That new hardness of expression, which she had copied from her husband's looks, set in once more;

it was an old-looking face, on which the candle-light fell in that lonely room.

"I will go!" she said again, this time more firmly.

Then she snatched up her bonnet and shawl from the bed, and put them on hastily, glancing at her white face in the dressing-glass, and scared not by its wildness. She did not stay to reason—to reflect upon her future course. She had resolved to go away; her own wish now was to leave that ill-fated house, and be never heard of more! Perhaps Neal might be sorry after she had gone—it would be a lesson to him, then; and in the future his hard words might turn upon himself! He had not spared her; he could have no worse opinion of her than he now possessed; let her go away, and make him happy by her going! With him she could not stay—better death than life with Neal now, she thought. Better death than life at all!

She was seized with a wild fear that she should be balked in her flight, and made hasty preparations—gathering together a mass of articles from the drawers, and then flinging all away from her, and going out of the room empty-handed.

Downstairs in the old sitting-room for the last time. The still small voice whispered "Stay!" then, but she took no heed. She was unloved, and would not stay—in the world she should find more sympathy than in that house!

Haunted by this last thought, she turned away and went stealthily downstairs. Not so stealthily, but Mrs. Higgs, warned of her descent, met her in the passage.

"Good lor!—how scared you look, Carry! Another quarrel, then?"

"Yes—the last, aunt!"

"Where are you going?"

"Out—I shall be back presently. Don't stand in my way, please—I'm desperate!"

"She's mad!—she's mad!"

Carry had wrenched open the door, and sent it back against the wall with a clashing noise, that reverberated through Fife Street.

Mrs. Higgs made a dash at her shawl, but Carry eluded her grasp, darted out into the wintry night, and ran wildly up the street.

"Carry!—NEAL!" cried Mrs. Higgs, rooted to the spot, until it was too late.

Then she ran bare-headed up the street also, leaving the door open.

But it was too late! The dark figure of the woman sick of home had vanished in the greater darkness, and in the men and women walking past the end of Fife Street, there was no trace of Carry. Mrs. Higgs crossed the road to No 1, and knocked. Neal came into the passage at the same time.

"Oh! Master Neal!—I think she's gone away for ever!"

"Hush, woman!—what do you mean?"

They went out of the house, and crossed the road together.

"Won't you see after her at once, sir?" asked Mrs. Higgs.

"She will come back, presently."

"Oh! I think——"

"Silence, my old friend! This is a needless alarm. She will come back, I say!"

But even in that hour he did not believe it. He guessed the truth then, as he knew it afterwards. She had followed her wishes, and his own; they were from that night irrevocably sundered.

He went into his room, and sat down in the

chair she had quitted. Mrs. Higgs following him, wringing her hands piteously.

"Won't you go after her?"

"She will come back, I tell you!"

"No—no, she won't! I saw it in her face."

"Then let her keep away. Of her own free will, she parts from me—preferring her woman's shame to my affection. I'll not stir to save her!"

"You're mad too—like your father!"

"Very likely."

"I'll go myself after her—I'll go to Mount Gardens, where that fellow used to live—that 'Essider."

"Go where you like!"

Neal turned his back upon her, and refused to move. If his wife sought that man, and left her home for *his* sake—why, she was not worth one effort to restrain. He took no heed of Mrs. Higgs's hasty departure, but sat struggling to be calm, vainly endeavouring to believe that it was all folly, and that Carry would presently come back. Why, she could not have been gone half an hour yet—and the shops were not closed. Early in the week she had spoken of a new bonnet—what folly on his part, and what madness on Mrs. Higgs'!

He went up-stairs, and stood in the doorway, looking at the confusion of dress left about the room by Carry. His keen eye detected a torn strip of paper on the floor; he stooped and picked it up.

A fragment of a letter that he had never seen, in Tressider's handwriting—addressed to Carry, his wife! He held it at arm's length, and read it.

"Star Hotel, Liverpool, July 8th, 18—

"DEAREST CARRY,

"Will you be very much surprised . . still dearest Carry to me. I ignore . . more of each other . . . dear to each other, to begin life afresh . . . . I don't like to think that we ever came to the resolution . . . our engagement. I professed . . . . . Full of hope, I am coming back . . . I write in advance . . . . I love you more passionately than ever . . . your whole future happy . . sanguine of a bright life . . . answer . . . write a line to me at Liverpool at once.

"Yours for ever affectionately,

"WALTER TRESSIDER."

These, the fragments of fact, left from a torn missive, but adding to an awful suspicion. Neal let the paper drop from his hand again, and stood staring where it had fallen, a basilisk in his path.

"Well—let her go!" he said; "she is not worth seeking—I will not stir."

He went back to the drawing-room, and shut himself in with his ghastly thoughts. The horror of it all met him there—the desolateness of his new life—the shipwreck of his home, happiness, and honour. He could not sit there and let the awful truths assail him. He must be stirring—he would go after Tressider also, and kill the villain!

As he sprang up, a knocking at the street-door startled him—made his heart beat like a frightened child's.

"It's Carry's knock—it's all a mistake, thank God!" he muttered to himself.

He went down-stairs, his heart still plunging, and opened the door. The cold night air rushed at him, and extinguished the light in his hand. A voice from the darkness in the streets without—a man's voice—said:

"Neal!"

"Mr. Pike!" responded Neal, dreamily.

"I couldn't rest—I couldn't stay till Monday! It's all right!"

"All right!—what?"

"The cold blast. We're successful, and our fortune's made!"

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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